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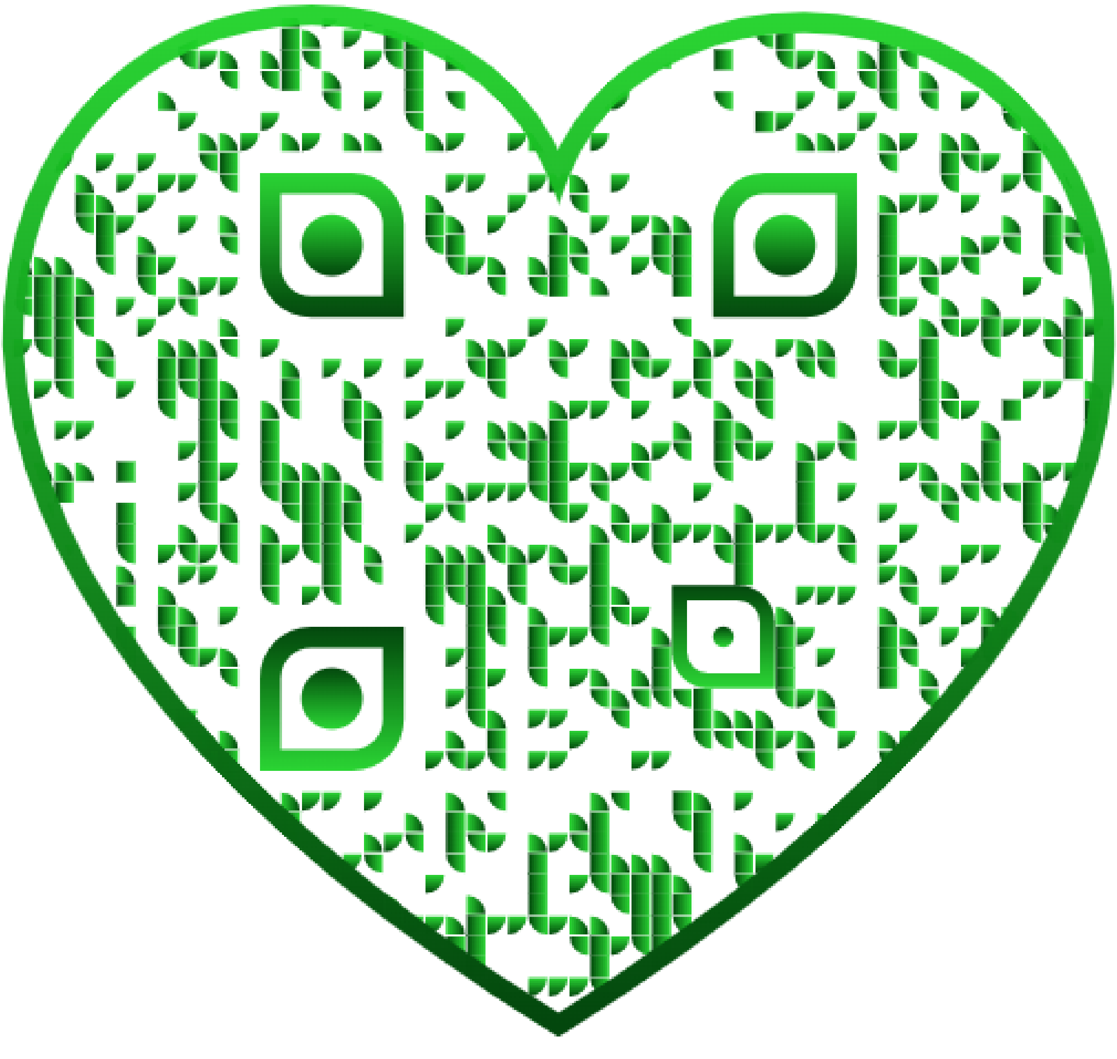

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COMMENT

GOVERNMENT EV SUBSIDY SCHEME IS A WIN-WIN

It's the carrot or stick conundrum: should the government boost EV sales with juicy incentives or by forcing manufacturers to sell them?

That decision was made for the car industry when the government introduced the ZEV mandate. Car makers had to produce and sell EVs, despite consumer demand for them being far lower than predicted.

The recent news of the reintroduction of a government subsidy shows that UK politicians are willing to put some money behind this direction of travel. The likelihood is that this subsidy scheme will stimulate demand, at least in the short to medium term, which will encourage consumers to go electric and help manufacturers.

However, the automotive industry is currently confused by the finer details of the scheme and seemingly was not consulted about it. No business is going to want to offer the discounts unless it's absolutely sure it's compliant with the terms of engagement but, as we outline on p14, the terms of engagement aren't clear.

Putting aside that very reasonable doubt, this subsidy is ultimately good news. EVs become cheaper, which means consumers have been given a carrot rather than the stick. That can only be a win-win, for drivers and the car world.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

Jaguar's future is here
The controversial, internet-breaking Type 00 concept has landed in the UK and caused quite a stir. Felix Page shows you round.

New Ferrari F80 driven
Ferrari normally launches specials at Fiorano – but for the F80 it had to find a faster circuit. Matt Prior straps in for a drive.

Smart Roadster from £1500
Former daily-driver choice of car design legend Gordon Murray, this once overpriced new car is now a quirky, cheap used gem.

"I'll long treasure the memory of nailing my first heel-and-toe downshift to The Ketchup Song" p62

AUTOCAR
Issue 6681 | Volume 325 | No 7

NEWS

Maserati priming V6 super-GT 4
Vauxhall Mokka GSe is 276bhp EV 8
£22,000 MG 2 to gun for Renault 5 10
Denza's UK launch plans revealed 12
Electric Car Grant: detail analysed 14
Latest new targets for car thieves 16

FIRST DRIVES

Mercedes-Benz CLA 24
Honda Prelude 28
Mazda 6e 30
Aston Martin Vanquish Volante 33
Skoda Enyaq vRS 34
Skoda Elroq vRS 35

ROAD TEST

MG S5 EV Long Range Trophy 36

FEATURES

Vantage battles Artura and Roma 44
Best cars in new Renault museum 52
Why car firms still love using steel 54

LONG-TERMERS

Suzuki Swift 56
Range Rover Evoque 58

COLUMNS

Jesse Crosse 13
Mark Tisshaw 15
Steve Cropley 17
Matt Prior 18
Damien Smith 19
Testing, testing 43
Why I love... 74

EVERY WEEK

Your Views 20
How to subscribe 22
Access 130 years of Autocar 42
Lost in the archive 65
Road test results 67

USED CARS

Alfa Romeo Stelvio buying guide 60
My car & I 62
Caught in the classifieds 63

30 MAZDA 6E: CHINESE-BASED EV RATED

52 SNEAK PREVIEW OF RENAULT MUSEUM

GETTY IMAGES

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MASERATI PLOTS ‘PURE’, ICE-ONLY GT FLAGSHIP

Limited-run luxury GT model in the works with V6 petrol power and a manual ’box

Maserati is considering a new flagship super-GT with V6 power and a manual gearbox as part of a drive to emphasise its sporting heritage and strengthen the brand’s luxury credentials.

Set to be a limited-run creation, the new top-rung Maserati could be launched as early as next year as the most exclusive and powerful combustion-engined car the firm has produced since the MC12 landed two decades ago.

It is tipped to be based on the Granturismo and will be twinned with an equivalent Alfa Romeo model, similar to the way in which the new Alfa 33 Stradale is based on Maserati’s MC20.

Speaking to Autocar at the Goodwood Festival of Speed earlier this month, Santo Ficili, who is CEO of both marques, said: “We have infinite possibilities to customise products for our customers, for the entire range of Maserati. I’m imagining to do something like we did in the past, also considering Alfa Romeo.”

Ficili referenced previous collaborations between the two firms, highlighting that the Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione was based on the previous Maserati Granturismo and built alongside that car at Maserati’s plant in Modena, where the later 4C sports coupé was also produced.

More recently, Alfa Romeo turned to Maserati to provide the basis for the new 33 Stradale supercar, which shares its basic monocoque chassis and twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine with the mid-engined MC20 (now rebadged MCPura).

“We built the 4C and 8C in Modena, so why not?” said Ficili of the prospect of another limited-run supercar tie-up. “We can imagine a ‘few-off’ Maserati. It’s easy, because you can look at the past of these two brands, and you can find a nice car like the 33 Stradale, and we can invent something like this.”

Ficili stopped short of describing in more detail his vision for a new bespoke creation but suggested the aim is to use the new flagship to celebrate Maserati’s Nettuno V6 engine, as used in the Granturismo, Grecale and MCPura. “It’s a masterpiece,” he said.

It is likely that any V6-powered limited-run special would ramp up the Nettuno’s output beyond the 621bhp of the MCPura, in line

New car set to be most exclusive Maserati since V12-powered MC12

AUTOCAR IMAGE

with a price that would be well in excess of that car's £230,000, but the firm is unlikely to use electrification to achieve that power boost.

Maserati engineering boss Davide Danesin said: "There are still customers looking for pure mechanical cars." He added that there is a "bad feeling" about having a battery on board a supercar, due to the heightened complexity and extra weight it brings.

The Nettuno's "super-advanced" pre-chamber combustion technology and twin injection system help to cut emissions and boost performance, he said, and the engine is "getting to 210hp per litre with very efficient combustion". That figure is why the MCPura can remain a pure-combustion car and it means Maserati can keep the V6 in production with the same power once Euro 7 regulations are in force.

Giving further clues to what a limited-run Maserati supercar could look like, Danesin even dropped a hint that it could reintroduce a manual gearbox to Maserati's ranks for the first time in years.

He said: "A manual gearbox is an opportunity. I don't see that in big series [production], but why not do a special version with a manual gearbox? No reason to say never. It could be the right choice for a limited edition of a car."

He added that a manual gearbox would emphasise the 'pure', analogue ethos of a Maserati supercar. "By doing a purely mechanical car, it does make sense to have a mechanical gearbox with a shifter," he said. "So why not? It fulfils perfectly the brand. It fulfils perfectly our approach and the mindset. So honestly, I think one day we'll do it."

Ficili said he plans to emphasise Maserati's Italian heritage going forward, adding that the company's headquarters in Modena – "the middle of Motor Valley" – is "the right place" to build sports cars. The firm will shortly begin production of the Granturismo and Grancabrio at its factory ▸

"A manual gearbox would emphasise the 'pure' ethos of a Maserati supercar"

Maserati CEO Ficili is open to platform and tech sharing with Alfa

◂ there once again, having built the current generation at Fiat's Mirafiori plant since 2023. Any new V6 special edition will be closely related to those cars.

Neither Danesin nor Ficili gave any indication of when this new supercar could break cover, but next year will be the 100th anniversary of the launch of Maserati's first car, the Tipo 26 grand prix racer that won Italy's legendary Targa Florio endurance race on its first competitive outing in 1926.

The following year, Alfa Romeo launched the venerable 6C 1500 sports car, which went on to win the Mille Miglia and the Spa 24 Hours. An Alfa Romeo version of Maserati's next limited-run sports car would no doubt celebrate the centenary of that seminal model.

PHEV LIFELINE FOR QUATTROPORTE?

Another tie-up with Alfa Romeo could add plug-in hybrid powertrains to Maserati's model range as it bridges the gap between its purely combustion-engined cars and EVs.

Currently the firm has three powertrain types spread across its three model lines: pure-V6, mild-hybrid turbo four-cylinder, and pure-electric. But Ficili said the company needs to offer its customers "all the possibilities" of propulsion as it gears up to go electric.

"What's sure is that we need to talk with our customers, because they are a bit confused at this time," he said. "You can imagine: PHEV, BEV, mild hybrid… We need to stay in touch with our customers."

Ficili added: "I don't know when we will go totally BEV. For sure in the future, but I don't know when automotive will go in this direction. It's a question of timing. In the middle, we need to consider MHEV and PHEV engines, depending on the development of the technology we want to follow."

Maserati's current cars are based on platforms that would not readily accommodate plug-in hybrid powertrains, but sibling brand Alfa Romeo is poised to launch a new Stelvio SUV and Giulia saloon on Stellantis's new STLA Large platform, which can accommodate ICE, EV and hybrid drivetrains.

Ficili suggested that Maserati would also use the flexible STLA structure for future models and said a push for "synergies" between the two Italian

"Another tie-up with Alfa could add PHEVs to Maserati's model range"

Alfa link could put postponed Quattroporte back on track

MASERATI NOT FOR SALE DESPITE 57% DROP IN DELIVERIES

Levante was a strong commercial performer for Maserati when it was still on sale; successor is an option

Maserati boss Santo Ficili has adamantly dismissed recent reports that Stellantis was considering selling off Maserati amid a dramatic downturn in sales and with no new volume products in the immediate pipeline.

The brand's deliveries decreased 57% last year to just 11,300 cars, and it finished the year with a £221 million operating loss. In the first three months of this year, Maserati sold just 1700 cars globally, a 48% year-on-year drop. And to the end of June, the brand had delivered just 171 cars in the UK – mainly comprising the Grecale.

But Ficili is bullish that Maserati can remain an important part of the Stellantis empire because it is "the only luxury brand" in the company's 14-marque portfolio.

Responding to reports of a possible sell-off, Ficili added: "The future of Maserati will be in Stellantis. At the moment, we don't have the idea to sell the brand. As soon as I hear these kinds of questions, they pass immediately through my brain from one side to the other."

He said Maserati will continue to be "managed like the other brands" in Europe (Peugeot, Citroën, Fiat, DS, Opel-Vauxhall, Alfa Romeo, Jeep and Lancia) but "of course keeping separate the soul of this brand, because it's the only brand we have this way".

Ficili added: "But be sure that it will be part of our future in Stellantis."

WHY THE MC20 EV ISN'T DEAD YET

The electric version of the MC20 supercar could still see the light of day if the market picks up, says Maserati, after it cancelled the model earlier this year, citing insufficient demand.

Promising huge power and similar dynamics to those of the V6 car, the MC20 Folgore would have been the first electric supercar on sale – the circa-2000bhp Rimac Nevera, Pininfarina Battista and Lotus Evija meriting full-bore hypercar status.

Shelved MC20 EV might reappear in future as electric MCPura

Its potentially seminal status was ultimately its downfall, though, with nothing comparable on sale against which it could be benchmarked. Maserati wasn't confident it would attract a sufficient number of buyers away from V6 and V8-engined alternatives to recoup the substantial development costs.

Maserati CEO Santo Ficili stands by the decision and said: "I don't think it's the right time to take this kind of supercar in the electrification direction."

But he added that the MC20 Folgore project was on pause, rather than cancelled, and the car could yet make production as the MCPura Folgore.

"Let's say we will see," he said when asked if the firm's supercar could yet go electric. "The project is [advanced], but we decided to wait to understand what is going to happen."

There are no immediate plans to begin development again. Ficili said: "We have this fantastic [V6] engine that is to the satisfaction of our customers. We hold a different kind of power. This is our engine at this time."

He added that he did not have the "crystal ball" to see when there will be a market for an electric supercar, and that it was crucial "to have the customer ready to buy a car like this" before investing further.

AUTOCAR
IMAGE

manufacturers could mean their cars become more closely related. That opens the door for the next Giulia and Stelvio to provide the basis for a new Quattroporte and Levante respectively, with the choice of EV and hybrid power.

Maserati was due to launch a new Quattroporte saloon this year as its first electric-only model, but last year it announced the seventh-generation car had been pushed back to 2028 due to "the need to take zero risks on the performance level". Development is understood to have been roughly half complete.

Twinning the next Quattroporte with the new Giulia, which is due next year as a BMW 5 Series rival with EV and ICE options, could speed up the development of Maserati's saloon, with R&D costs drastically reduced as a result. Similarly, if Maserati tapped the next Stelvio to provide the basis for a second-generation Levante, it could quickly re-enter the popular sports SUV market and offer the same choice of petrol and EV power as the big-selling Porsche Cayenne.

Maserati could develop PHEVs on the platform used by Alfa's new Stelvio

SPY SHOT

Ficili added there was a need "to keep the two brands separated" in terms of positioning, but there were opportunities for the two to share "platforms, electronic architectures, software and probably powertrains". He stopped short of confirming plans to align the two brands' line-ups more closely.

FELIX PAGE AND CHARLIE MARTIN

VAUXHALL GSE GOES ALL-ELECTRIC WITH HOT MOKKA

Mokka Electric gets 276bhp performance makeover and GSe badge

Vauxhall has reimagined its GSe performance brand with a new version of the Mokka Electric that has nearly double the power of the standard car.

Previewed by the Mokka GSe Rally prototype in May, the crossover's arrival marks the relaunch of GSe, most recently used for the plug-in hybrid Astra GSe, as a badge for performance-honed fully electric cars. The Mokka is also a more serious proposition than the Astra, with substantially more power and extensive chassis modifications.

Its new motor, which is shared with the Abarth 600e, the Alfa Romeo Junior Elettrica Veloce and the new Peugeot e-208 GTi, puts out 276bhp and 254lb ft. That's sent to the front wheels through a Torsen limited-slip differential, and it allows the Mokka GSe to hit 62mph from rest in 5.9sec.

Cabin features bright yellow accents and Alcantara bucket seats

To cope with that significant uptick in performance, the GSe's rear axle has been redesigned to add an anti-roll bar and tauter bushings. Together, these are said to increase the back end's torsional stiffness by 189% compared with the regular car.

The GSe also gets more heavily weighted steering, 380mm Alcon front brake discs with four-pot calipers and new dampers with hydraulic bump stops. The Mokka GSe rides on new 20in alloy wheels shod with Michelin Pilot Sport EV tyres, and it tips the scales at less than 1600kg.

The brand has yet to disclose a range, but the e-208 GTi, 600e and Junior Elettrica Veloce all return around 200 miles between charges. For reference, the standard Mokka EV has a 247-mile claimed range from the same 54kWh battery used by the GSe.

Visually, the new model is marked out by its neon yellow contrasting elements and new gloss black panels on its front and rear bumpers. Inside, it has Alcantara bucket seats and door cards, and the infotainment touchscreen features new displays including a g-force meter.

Prices and delivery dates have yet to be confirmed, but a 600e with the 276bhp motor starts from £39,885, while the Junior Elettrica Veloce is £42,305.

That suggests the Vauxhall could land in the high-£30,000s – possibly just undercutting the UK's new £40,000 luxury car tax threshold.

CHARLIE MARTIN

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Powertrain is shared with other Stellantis EVs from Abarth, Alfa and Peugeot

"The 276bhp motor allows the Mokka GSe to hit 62mph from rest in 5.9sec"

VAUX POPS: HOT HIGHLIGHTS

Chevette HS (1978)
Homologation special got a massive front air dam and a reworked 135bhp 16-valve four-pot. Hilariously good fun but slightly understeery for a short-wheelbase, rear-wheel-drive machine.

Astra Coupé Turbo 888 (2002)
Limited-run Astra celebrated Team Triple Eight's domination of the BTCC, with 187bhp, a lairy rear spoiler and a transformative chassis overhaul. Two decades on it's a rarity.

Zafira VXR (2005)
Possibly the silliest performance car ever, melding seven-seat practicality with a 237bhp turbo four. Predictably a bit shabby to drive but hilarious all the same.

Corsa VXR Nürburgring (2011)
No prizes for guessing where this one was developed. Gained a limited-slip diff, stiffer springs and Bilstein dampers, priming it for track action.

XC90 TO LIVE ON WITH THIRD GENERATION

VOLVO WILL DEVELOP a third-generation XC90 SUV, the company's CEO has said, as the phase-out of combustion-engined models continues to be more protracted than the brand originally predicted.

Volvo has recently facelifted the 10-year-old second-gen XC90 after giving it a stay of execution amid delays to the EX90 large electric SUV, which was originally intended to be the XC90's replacement.

However, CEO Håkan Samuelsson said a third-generation model is on the cards. "We will need a new XC90," he told investors on the company's second-quarter earnings call, although he stopped short of giving a launch date for its replacement.

A new XC90 is likely to be a long-range plug-in hybrid after Samuelsson indicated the technology will make it to Europe from China, where Volvo will start production of the new XC70 plug-in hybrid, which has a claimed 112-mile electric range, in the next three months.

"This is something I think European consumers will want," he said. "Plug-in hybrids with a longer range are a solution that probably we will need for some more years than we thought."

Volvo committed in 2021 to going all-electric by 2030, but it has since backtracked due to the varying pace of global EV take-up.

The XC70 is built on a new Geely platform called Scalable Modular Architecture, which could also underpin a new XC90. The facelifted XC90 plug-in hybrid continues with a comparatively small battery of just under 15kWh, compared with either 21kWh or 40kWh for the XC70.

Second-gen XC90 has been on sale since 2015 and was due to be axed

NEW 5 TO JOIN JAECOO'S UK LINE-UP AS EVOQUE RIVAL

THE RANGE ROVER Evoque-rivalling Jaecoo 5 will go on sale this summer, priced from £24,505.

The 5 will become the second model in the Chery-owned brand's UK range following the popular 7, which has amassed 8399 sales so far this year.

At launch, the 5 will be powered by a 145bhp 1.6-litre turbocharged petrol engine. Details on the EV variant will follow in the "coming weeks".

The entry-level 5 comes with a 13.2in vertical touchscreen, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and all-round parking cameras. For £28,000, Luxury trim adds a panoramic roof and ventilated front seats.

The 5 arrives in 1.6 petrol form, with a battery-electric version to follow

JOBS TO GO AT JLR AS AMERICAN TARIFFS TAKE THEIR TOLL

JLR WILL CUT up to 500 jobs in the UK as it grapples with declining sales in the wake of the new American import tariffs.

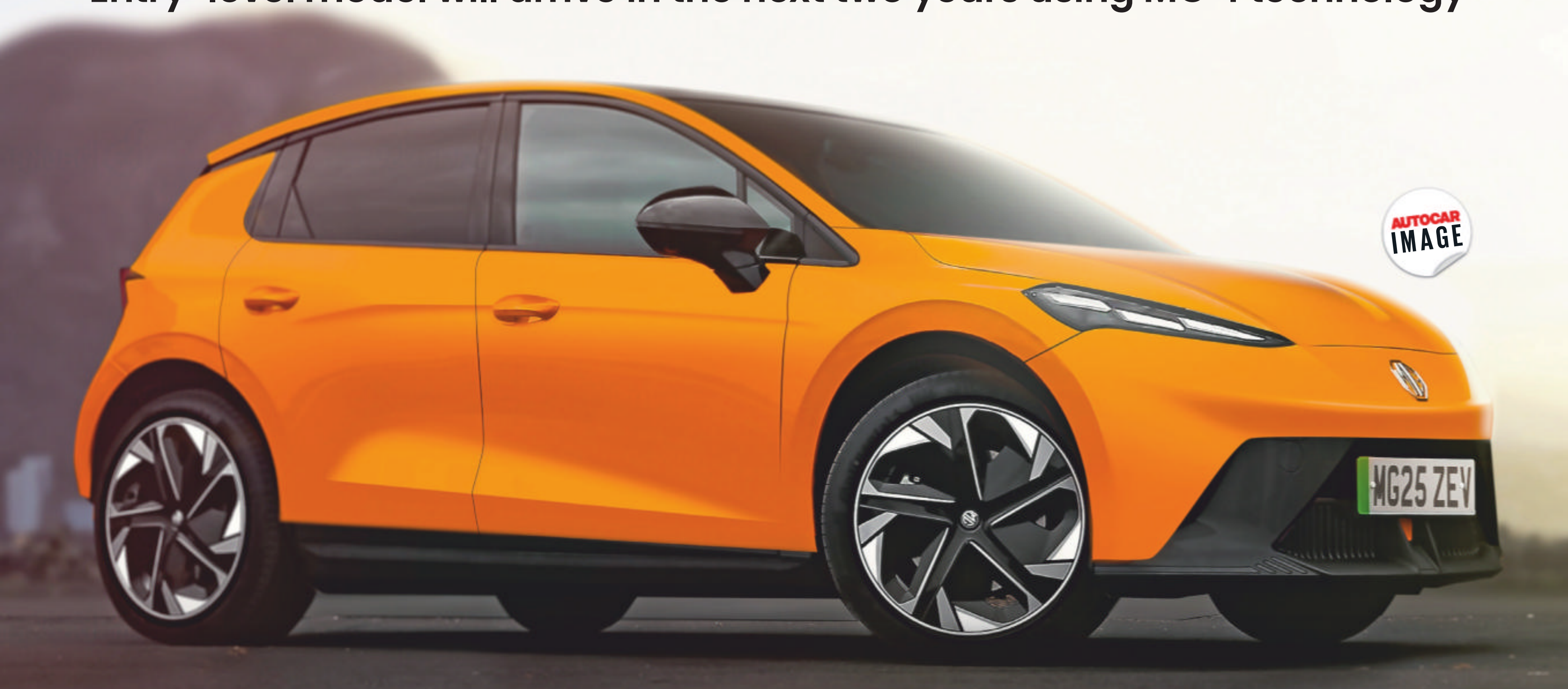
The company said it will offer roughly 1.5% of its workforce a voluntary redundancy package. The impacted roles are managerial positions, but JLR has not said which departments or facilities will be affected.

An official statement said: "JLR regularly offers eligible employees voluntary redundancy [VR] programmes. Through this limited UK VR programme for managers, JLR is aligning its leadership workforce for the business's current and future needs."

The news follows a sharp 10.7% year-on-year drop in sales during the last quarter. JLR partly attributed this to a reduction in US sales: – it paused shipments to the US following the introduction of substantial 25% import tariffs in April. The UK has recently negotiated a lower, 10% tariff rate.

MG TARGETS RENAULT 5 WITH NEW UK-DESIGNED £22K EV

Entry-level model will arrive in the next two years using MG 4 technology



MG's Renault 5 rival will hit roads by 2028 priced from around £22,000 and it will be fully designed in the UK.

Likely to be called MG 2, the new EV will sit below the 4 hatchback as the entry-level model to MG's seven-strong EV line-up, which has been bolstered recently by the IM 5, IM 6 and MG S5 (see road test, p36).

MG UK boss David Allison mooted early plans for such a model to Autocar last year and, speaking at the Goodwood Festival of Speed earlier this month, he confirmed that the new EV will be priced competitively relative to the likes of the Renault 5, which starts at £22,995.

He said: "One of the things that we've always had is that affordable price position on EVs but we don't have that any more. We are nowhere near the cheapest when it comes to EV sales, because so many other brands and so many other models come into that space now.

"So when I price that car, I will price it as aggressively as I can get away with and the view will be very much on affordability, very much on monthly payments."

Allison confirmed that "fairly advanced" concepts have already been built, which suggests that production mules could soon begin testing.

Although he disclosed no technical details, it is understood that the new entry-level MG will use the same SAIC battery-electric Modular Scalable Platform as the MG 4 – a new version of which will arrive in the UK soon (see separate story, right).

It is likely that the new MG 2 will be benchmarked against the Renault 5, which is powered by a single 150bhp motor and offers a top-end range of 250 miles from a 52kWh battery.

Allison said the sales response to the Renault 5 has shown the market for small, affordable electric cars is much bigger than previously anticipated – and therefore it is crucial to launch such a model as soon as possible.

"The Renault 5 has made the job much more important," he said. "I've always felt that was the next market that was going to happen, because as Europe transitions towards EVs, inevitably the easiest way of making them more affordable is downsizing."

Asked how soon the car will arrive, given the segment is set to expand with the Volkswagen ID 2 and its Cupra and Skoda equivalents within the next 18 months, Allison said: "I want to sell it now, but I can't have everything I always want. I think that car is still probably a couple of years away."

However, he was confident that this prediction can be bettered, given the speed at which MG is able to turn drawings into showroom models.

"I think it's very possible," he said. "One of the things that has always impressed me very much about the way that this company operates is the speed of development."

Allison also said the UK team will have a big hand in creating it: "Having the London design studio is quite helpful. I've seen some concepts and drawings of the car. It fills me with lots and lots of confidence that that should be really, really successful in the space."

On the need for a car like this to be designed in the UK, he said: "It has to be, because that car wouldn't succeed in China.

"I mean, in a lot of Asian markets, such as Korea, you tend not to see cars smaller than a C-segment hatchback. So to try and conceive a four-metre battery-electric car that has very much a European [style] just won't really work.

"So that kind of car, in my view, has to have a more European-centric approach in terms of styling."

WILL RIMELL

"I'll price it as aggressively as I can get away with"

Renault 5 sets benchmark for MG and shows size of market

CUPRA READIES BOLD CABIN

A concept showcasing Cupra's future interiors will be unveiled at September's Munich motor show. A preview picture depicts a radical cabin with a yoke-like wheel, central 'spine' and racing seats.

STELLANTIS AXES FCEV TECH

Citroën, Fiat and Peugeot owner Stellantis has ended development of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles and canned the launch of its small and medium hydrogen vans. It cited lack of demand and infrastructure issues.

OPEL
VIVARO-e HYDROGEN

Corvette line-up has E-Ray hybrid but there are no plans for an EV

CORVETTE TO KEEP ROLLING WITH V8 AS EV VERSION 'STILL SCIENCE FICTION'

THE CHEVROLET CORVETTE will continue to be powered by a V8 engine in the long term because parent company General Motors will not rush out an electric variant "just to meet that [2035 EV] regulation", its engineering boss has told Autocar.

The nameplate returned to the UK with the right-hand-drive V8-powered Stingray in 2021 as a halo model in GM's wider comeback in Europe. The line-up now also includes the track-honed Z06 and the hybrid V8 E-Ray.

But speaking to Autocar, General Motors chief performance car engineer Tony Roma said that while electric cars are the future, plans for a Corvette EV have yet to be officially drawn up. "Right now, it's still science fiction," he said.

Instead, the sports car will continue to be powered by a V8, either in naturally aspirated form (as long as the regulations allow it) or with a hybrid element, as with the E-Ray.

Looking forward, Roma said that when an electric Corvette does eventually come, it will need to be "engaging" and offer "something different".

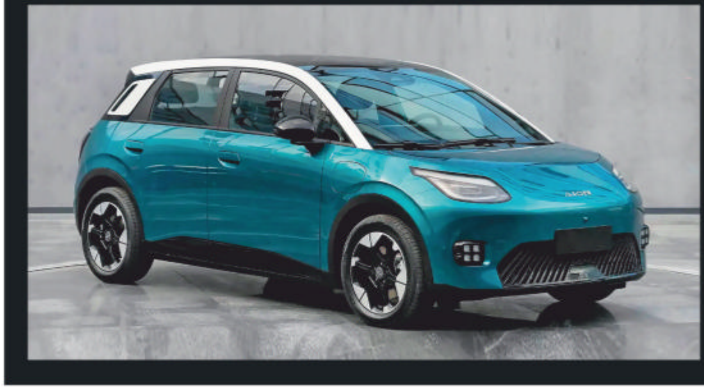
He said: "So that's our challenge – to come up with that something different, that something engaging.

"When we can figure out how to do that, we will, but we're not going to do an electric version of this car just to do it."

Roma added that GM won't accelerate development of an EV Corvette just so the car can stay on sale in Europe after 2035, when all new cars on sale must be electric. "We will not make a car just to meet that regulation," he said.

GAC WILL ENTER UK WITH PRICE-LED HATCH AND SUV

GAC, one of China's biggest car makers, has confirmed that it will launch in the UK early next year with the Aion UT hatchback (pictured) and Aion V SUV to rival Volkswagen's ID 3 and ID 4.



A joint-venture partner of Honda and Toyota, GAC plans to undercut established marques on price to attract buyers. As a result, prices are expected to start in the mid- to high-£20,000s for its introductory models.

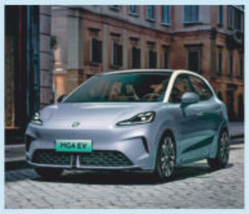
ALL-NEW MG 4 POISED TO MAKE UK DEBUT SOON

MG is expected to bring the second-generation 4 to Europe imminently after its design was registered with European legislators.

The new hatchback (below) is already on sale in China and is markedly different from the car it replaces. It is bigger, features a new Cyberster-inspired design and has a new cabin. In China, it is sold with a single 161bhp electric motor (down from 168bhp) and draws electricity from a battery of undisclosed capacity.

In a statement, MG told Autocar: "We can confirm this is an official patent application but this is standard practice and it is too early to say whether this design will be offered in the UK."

While MG would not confirm that the car is destined for the UK, Autocar understands its arrival is expected soon. The current 4 is one of MG's best-sellers in the UK and production of the first-gen car, which is built alongside its successor, will soon end.



ID 3 STANDS TEST OF TIME

A Volkswagen ID 3 tested over 107,000 miles has lost only eight miles of battery range. Tested over four years by the ADAC, Germany's AA equivalent, the car's 77kWh battery capacity dropped by only 9%.

BRIT LEADS RENAULT GROUP

The Renault Group has appointed Duncan Minto as interim CEO as it searches for a replacement for Luca de Meo. Minto, a Brit who joined Renault in 1997, became the group's chief financial officer in March.

DENZA EYES PREMIUM RIVALS WITH THREE-CAR UK LAUNCH

BYD's luxury offshoot here next year with shooting brake, MPV and 4x4

BYD will grow its Denza premium brand in the UK with a network of stand-alone dealers and an expanded range of models including rivals to the Land Rover Defender and Range Rover.

Denza made its UK debut at the Goodwood Festival of Speed, where it showed the Z9 GT shooting brake, the Defender 110-sized B5 4x4 and the D9 luxury MPV. Speaking to Autocar, BYD vice-president Stella Li said these three models are just the start of an ambitious plan to disrupt the European premium car market.

"We need premium," she said. "This year [at Goodwood] we have three Denza premium models, which give you a new experience, really focusing on the premium area."

The first UK-bound Denza model is the Z9 GT shooting brake, which is due on sale in the first quarter of next year with the choice of EV or plug-in hybrid power. The D9 PHEV MPV will follow a few months after, and the 677bhp B5 4x4 will arrive by the end of the year.

The B5 is sold in China as the Bao 5, as part of BYD's new Fangchengbao range. Li said the company plans to bring the other Fangchengbao models here with a Denza badge.

That line-up includes the B8 – a larger 4x4 PHEV in the vein of the Toyota Land Cruiser and Land Rover Defender 130 – and the Tai 3, a chunky mid-sized electric crossover.

Li also highlighted the Denza N9, a more "lifestyle"-themed large electric SUV, as a possible addition to the range in Europe, to emphasise the brand's positioning by giving it a

B5 (main) and N9 (above) will take on Defender and Range Rover Electric respectively

Denza Z9 GT arrives in the UK early next year

RENAULT DESIGN BOSS PREDICTS MPV RENAISSANCE

THE PEOPLE CARRIER could make a comeback, Renault's design boss has predicted.

Gilles Vidal told Autocar that its return would be the result of designers exploring new ways to boost efficiency while departing from conventional SUV styling.

MPVs used to be big business in Europe, with the likes of the Renault Scenic, Vauxhall Zafira, Ford Galaxy and Citroën Picasso claiming a huge regional market share.

Since 2008, however, SUVs have taken over the family segment and now account for more than half of all European car sales.

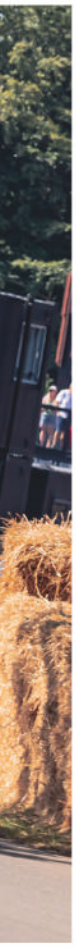
But Vidal says the transition to electrification could bring about an MPV renaissance, as car makers strive to make their models as efficient as possible and exploit the packaging freedoms of EV 'skateboard' architecture.

He said: "SUVs won the battle against MPVs, because MPVs are cars you need but you don't desire. Suddenly SUVs, with the same engines, same weight, same everything – they are shapes that you will desire. Now there's SUV-bashing going on, in Europe especially."

Vidal suggested that the quest for efficiency could ultimately prompt an all-out rethink for Europe's most popular type of car. He added: "What could kill SUVs? That's the interesting question. Maybe MPVs could come back in a sexier, desirable form."

MPVs are already playing an important role in China, the world's biggest car market, where manufacturers such as Zeekr, Lynk&Co, Li Auto, Denza and Xpeng have each launched luxurious three-row people movers.

Renault's Espace was an early force in Europe's once huge MPV market



rival to the forthcoming Range Rover Electric.

Li stopped short of disclosing more detailed launch plans but said the Denza range could be expected to expand at a rate of around one model every six months.

Denza will be pitched as a stand-alone brand in the UK, with dealerships separate from BYD showrooms. Li said the showrooms will be "very beautiful" spaces designed like a "crystal box", with a modern, minimalist layout and liberal use of glass.

The company doesn't want Denza to be seen as simply a sub-brand of BYD. "The importance is that people understand this is more premium," said Li, likening Denza to Audi, while BYD would be more aligned with Volkswagen.

Li said the design and technical capability of Denza's cars will help the brand compete with BMW and Mercedes. In the case of the B5, Li said its off-road prowess and high levels of technology will give it the edge against established rivals like the Defender. "Our technology, I would say, is 10 times better than legacy brands," she said. "They give you a new experience."

Li confirmed all Denza EVs will be compatible with BYD's new 1000kW ultra-rapid chargers, which can add 249 miles of range in just five minutes. Following their rollout in China earlier this year, BYD is in talks with partners to install the devices across the UK, where they will be by far the fastest chargers available.

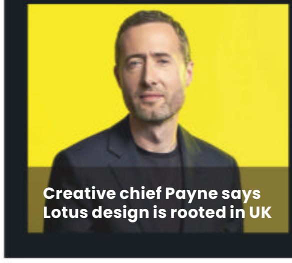
FELIX PAGE

UK BASE 'CRITICAL' FOR LOTUS'S CREATIVE FORCE

Lotus's design operations "must remain" in the UK, its creative chief has told Autocar, following recent reports that the brand could end production at its historic Hethel factory.

Designs of upcoming models are being penned at a new studio in Warwickshire, but the future of the brand in the UK was thrown into doubt last month after sources told Autocar that owner Geely was preparing to close the Norfolk plant, threatening 1300 jobs.

But this notion, with production potentially moving to the US, was countered by Lotus, which released a statement saying it had "no plans" to close its UK factory – reportedly after securing UK government support.



Creative chief Payne says Lotus design is rooted in UK

Speaking to Autocar at the Goodwood Festival of Speed, Ben Payne said the company's design operation should "absolutely" remain in the UK. He added: "Whatever would happen, certain aspects, critically, need to be here. From my perspective, being responsible for the creative side of a company like this, it must remain in the UK. It's the home of the company and it's part of the spirit and nationality. It's very important to me – it's a British brand, and it needs to remain so.

"You have to look at it from an expertise point of view. There's a reason why so many design and technical sides of automotive are still placed here. We have the talent in this country. I don't think people should be worried about that. The talent is here, the resonance – all from a brand perspective – is here, which it always will be for Lotus. I don't see it changing at all."

SKODA TURNS THE ENYAQ INTO A VAN

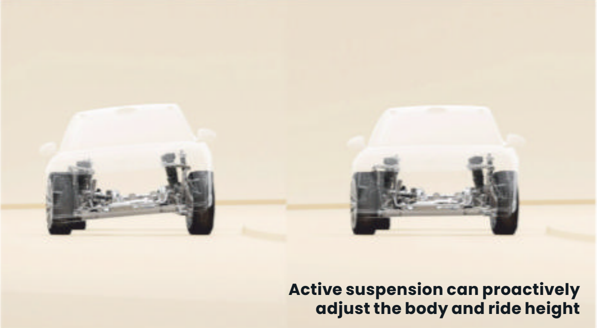
Skoda has launched a new van variant of its Enyaq electric SUV.

The commercial version trades its back seats for an expansive cargo area. Like the similarly conceived car-based Toyota Corolla van, the Enyaq's exterior remains untouched.

Sold as a £1815 (plus VAT) conversion of the £44,310 Enyaq 85, it was developed with specialist Strongs Plastic Products and will be offered to fleet buyers only.

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



Active suspension can proactively adjust the body and ride height

ACTIVE SUSPENSION READY FOR THE MAINSTREAM IN ET9

ADAPTIVE DAMPING ISN'T new, but active suspension, which Nio has developed for its flagship ET9, is a far rarer beast. Called SkyRide and developed in conjunction with Clearmotion, it is described as "the world's first fully integrated hydraulic fully active suspension" (News, 9 July).

In road cars, adaptive damping has been widely adopted as a way of varying the damping force on the fly. This meant damping could adapt to different surfaces or driving styles and be adjusted through driving modes. Conventional adjustable dampers, typically used for aftermarket tuning or in motorsport, can only be adjusted manually by the turn of a screw.

Active suspension is different. Computer-controlled hydraulics or mechanisms supplement springs to control the car's body movements much more effectively. So while dampers provide some resistance to the movement of springs and adaptive dampers do the same thing *reactively*, *active* suspension is just that: active – it can move the body on the chassis if needs be.

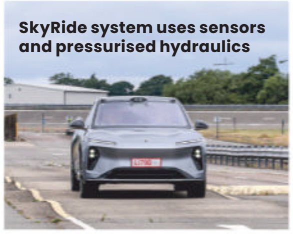
The advantage is improved comfort and superior handling through better control of body movements. The system also integrates with the steer-by-wire and braking systems to improve stability if there's a tyre blowout. Proof was a demonstration of SkyRide with front and rear tyres being deflated on the same side of the car at 100mph without mishap.

Some early Formula 1 systems did away with conventional springs altogether and the active suspension also fulfilled the basic task of keeping the car off the ground. But this requires energy-sapping power, so the Nio system retains soft air springs to do that job. Powered by a hydraulic pump, the active element controls the body during cornering, riding undulations and bumps. It's lightning-fast, making adjustments 1000 times a second and in-cabin motion is said to be reduced by 75% compared with conventional suspension.

SkyRide can adjust ride height on one aspect of the car if sensors detect an impending impact: if the car is about to be rear-ended, it can raise the tail to achieve the best bumper-to-bumper contact. There are also a few useful and fun features: when stationary it can shake off accumulated snow through controlled body movements, and it can drop the ride height for occupants to get in and out faster than conventional air-sprung suspension with a similar function.

It also links with gaming functions (which are increasingly relevant in China) and can integrate with the ET9's in-cabin '5D Cinema' so, for example, you get the full shaking effect when the dinosaurs attack in Jurassic Park.

SkyRide will be tuned for other markets when the ET9 arrives in Europe, although Nio isn't yet saying when that will be.



SkyRide system uses sensors and pressurised hydraulics

UK EV GRANTS WELCOMED BUT THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL

Complex criteria will determine which cars qualify for £3750 subsidy

The UK government has reintroduced grants for new electric cars, offering discounts of up to £3750 – but there remains uncertainty over how the scheme will work, and most Chinese-built EVs could be excluded altogether.

The new Electric Car Grant (ECG) arrives as a way of incentivising sales of EVs as demand weakens while mandated emissions targets continue to rise.

Backed by £650 million of government funding, the ECG will apply to certain new EVs priced at or below £37,000 (although higher trim levels can exceed that figure and still qualify if an entry model with the same battery starts below it).

The move is a win for the UK automotive industry after months of fierce lobbying to help ease the burden of hitting the strict EV sales targets imposed by the ZEV mandate.

It comes three years after the previous, Conservative-led government axed the Plug-in Car Grant, which offered a fixed £1500 off the list price of EVs that cost less than £32,000.

Unlike that scheme, UK buyers will not have to apply for the grant themselves. Instead, car firms will submit their EVs for inclusion in the scheme, based on the government's criteria. However, manufacturers will find that accessing the money isn't easy.

"The criteria for qualification looks quite tough," former Nissan executive Andy Palmer told Autocar. "I'm in contact with several OEMs and they still don't know which models will qualify."

EVs made in Asia, including in China, which are among the cheapest on sale, are expected to be excluded from the scheme.

This is owing to its strict emissions barometer, which includes penalising battery manufacturing in countries with carbon-intensive grids.

The basic criteria for the new scheme are easy to understand. Alongside the £37,000 limit, cars must also be offered with a battery warranty that lasts for 100,000 miles or eight years, with an agreement to replace the pack if it falls below 70% capacity during that period.

However, the factor that determines whether a car falls into the highest band-one category for the full £3750 grant or band two for £1500, or is excluded altogether, is based on its environmental score – and that's where the qualification process becomes opaque.

The score is based on the manufacturing location of not only the car but also the battery cells. If the country of manufacture generates much of the power for its national grid from fossil fuels, then the car will be denied a grant. The cell source accounts for 70% of the environmental eligibility score and vehicle assembly contributes just 30%.

The government has said all cars are assessed equally and the environmental score element is to "incentivise more sustainable manufacturing practices", but the underlying purpose appears pretty clear.

> "The deciding factor is a car's environmental score"

CHINA/ASIA LIKELY TO BE PENALISED

"Let's call a spade a spade: this is probably looking to penalise cars that are produced in China," Tim Dexter, UK vehicles policy manager for green pressure group Transport & Environment, told Autocar.

At this stage, car makers are gathering evidence to prove they qualify so we don't yet have a list of eligible cars. But the scheme is very similar to the one operated in France and it can already be seen which cars there make the minimum environmental score and which don't.

No Chinese brands qualify there. Nor do EVs built in China by Western brands, such as the Mini Cooper E or Cupra Tavascan.

UK AUTOMOTIVE REACTS

BONO GE
MANAGER, UK, BYD

"We welcome the new grant and its potential to drive uptake and awareness. Like other brands, we will make an application for inclusion and look forward to being a part of it."

EURIG DRUCE
CEO, STELLANTIS UK

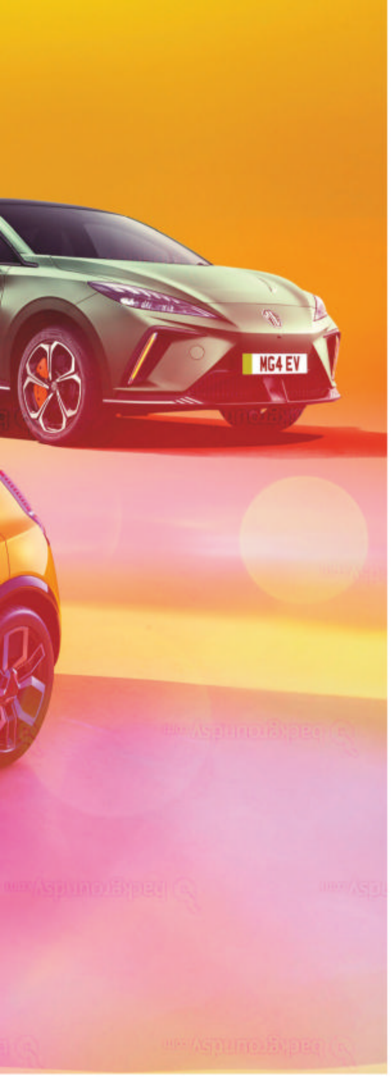
"We welcome the support being aimed at lower-priced cars. We have been asking for this for some time. Electrification of the mass market is crucial."

LISA BRANKIN
MD, FORD OF GB & IRELAND

"These grants are great news for UK drivers and will make purchasing an electric vehicle much more affordable. Ford applauds the UK government for taking this step."

MIKE HAWES
CEO, SMMT

"This announcement is a welcome response to consistent calls from the industry for more support. This is a clear signal to consumers that now is the time to switch."



It's not just China. No EV imported from Korea or Japan qualifies either. The French scheme takes into account distance travelled when totting up the environment score, which hurts Asian makers. The UK hasn't used that element but the promised hard look at the cleanliness of the national grid will penalise China, Korea and Japan, which are all more reliant on fossil fuels than Europe.

European Union manufacturing locations will be assessed based on grid carbon intensity per country, rather than as a whole across the EU.

So Polish-built EVs, such as the Jeep Avenger, and anyone using batteries from LG Chem's plant there (the biggest battery factory in Europe) could be downgraded due to Poland's coal-fired electricity grid, which is rated the worst in Europe for emissions at 594g CO_2/kWh, according to the European Environmental Agency.

Other high-emitting countries in Europe include the Czech Republic (361g CO_2/kWh) and Germany (320g CO_2/kWh).

French-built cars should be fine given the country's low-CO_2 energy generation. The Renault 5 and 4 are built at Douai and use batteries sourced nearby from Envision AESC.

EVs from Turkey, including the forthcoming Hyundai Ioniq 2, could be on shaky ground due to the European-Asian country's high grid emissions.

SCHEME GENEROUS TO UK MAKERS

The forthcoming Nissan Leaf should also score well. The government has distanced itself from reports that the scheme was established to give Nissan a leg-up as it finally starts production of its new electric crossover in northern England. But it's hard to see how the car won't be an automatic band-one recipient of the full £3750 grant.

The UK is better than the European average on grid intensity, with a rating in 2023 of 162g CO_2/kWh, and Nissan sources batteries in Sunderland from Envision AESC.

Reinforcing the idea that banding will be more generous to UK-embedded companies is a section on the car makers' application form that asks for 'UK presence – facilities and support' and 'UK opportunities'.

A further qualification hurdle is that car firms must be signed up to the Science Based Targets Initiative that monitors and approves CO_2 reduction goals within that company. This immediately takes Tesla out of the running after the US firm backed out of its commitments. Hyundai and Kia aren't signed up either, according to the SBTi dashboard that lists all participating companies. Stellantis also isn't listed, although its former iteration PSA Peugeot-Citroën is.

In short, the scheme will take a while to get going as car makers get their ducks lined up. Many won't qualify at all, but if it persuades someone – for example, Mini – to shift electric car manufacturing to the UK, it could prove to be worth the money spent.

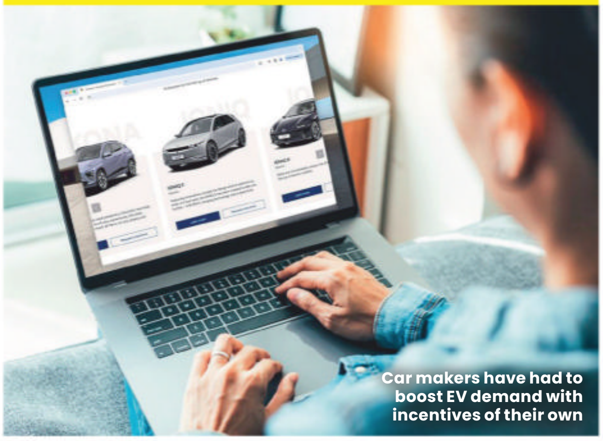
NICK GIBBS

China's CO_2-intensive energy grid could rule out brands such as BYD

The Mini Cooper E is built in China and so might not be eligible for the grant

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW



Car makers have had to boost EV demand with incentives of their own

AN OVERWHELMING majority of car makers have craved the return of incentives to boost demand for electric cars in the UK with ever-greater desperation since the start of 2024.

The government's ZEV mandate, introduced 18 months ago, meant manufacturers faced significant fines for not selling enough EVs, and barely an interview with a top UK exec from a legacy car maker has gone by – several of them in this column – without them saying they need government help to hit those targets because there is not enough true market demand for EVs.

To date, car makers have complied with the mandate and avoided fines. Yet it has come at a huge cost, with their own discounts to tempt buyers into new EVs totalling £6.5 billion, according to Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders data.

Against £6.5bn of discounts, the £650 million now put aside by the government for the Electric Car Grant (ECG) looks like loose change. No wonder one senior industry official said the scheme would "divide opinion", and not only for the sums involved.

The ECG is banded with discounts of £3750 or £1500, depending on complex criteria around the intensity of CO_2 in the national grid of the country of manufacture of both an EV and its battery, which Nick Gibbs details (see left).

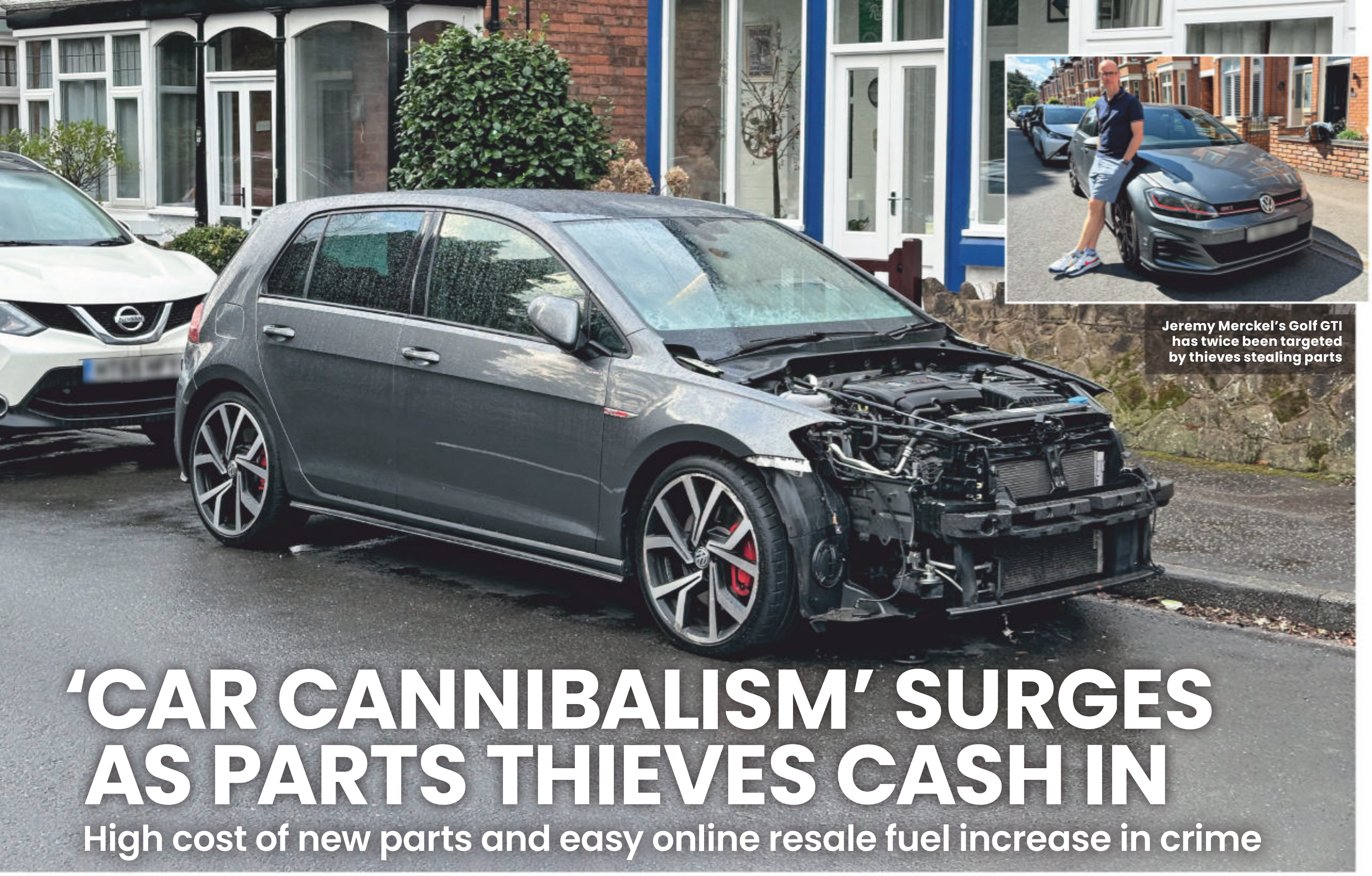
If all the discounts were only the smaller £1500, the ECG would cover subsidies towards just over 430,000 new EVs. Some 225,000 EVs were sold in the first half of this year in the UK, and given that the ZEV mandate's target ramps up each year, the ECG money is likely to run out well before the 2028-29 financial year until which the scheme is currently due to run, even allowing for a significant number of EVs being excluded from it.

Many of those who have welcomed the grant for now have used the opportunity to call for further investment and support, to build better infrastructure and support the growing number of EVs already on the road.

More fun and games are to come, then, but in the short term the ECG will at least have the desired effect by providing a boost to EV sales in the UK. The government will call it a success as a result, while car makers will get a helping hand towards ZEV mandate compliance.

"There is no country where EVs don't depend on incentives," said Jato's senior analyst Felipe Munoz, in reference to concerns about price, range, infrastructure and residual values. That's true even in the EV utopia of Norway, and it's true in China where, said Munoz, EV/PHEV buyers "are getting their licence plate faster and at lower rates". He added: "Without the active role of the governments, EVs can't go on by themselves."

"Many have used the opportunity to call for further support"



Jeremy Merckel's Golf GTI has twice been targeted by thieves stealing parts

'CAR CANNIBALISM' SURGES AS PARTS THIEVES CASH IN

High cost of new parts and easy online resale fuel increase in crime

Thefts of car parking sensors have risen by 300% amid an increase in overall vehicle parts crime across the country, a leading insurer has reported.

Admiral Insurance says that last year it recorded 142 claims for stolen parking sensors, compared with 36 claims the previous year, with an additional 104 claims for stolen steering wheels and airbags.

"Parking sensors are easily accessible and have a high resale demand," said Alex Wyard, director of technical underwriting at Allianz. "Criminals see parts theft as an easy way to make extra cash, and we have seen an increase in all types of theft relating to cars over the past year.

"New airbags can cost as much as £1200, but thieves sell stolen ones for a fraction of the price. Wing mirrors, catalytic converters, wheels and car emblems are also quick to sell on."

Volkswagen Golf GTI owner Jeremy Merckel is among the latest victims of vehicle parts theft. One morning in March he was woken by a neighbour with the news that thieves had stolen the headlights, front bumper, grille and bonnet from his car. "I was fuming," says Merckel, who lives in Sutton Coldfield. "A neighbour's doorbell camera showed one of the thieves casually walking away carrying the bumper above his head. I've been told the theft probably took no more than three minutes. It's the second time my Golf has been targeted: two years ago, the car's original front bumper was stolen. Surprisingly, the car hadn't been broken into, and apart from missing much of its front end, there was no other damage."

Merckel was warned by his insurer, Ageas UK, that his Golf, registered in 2019, might have to be written off. He says: "Their first reaction was: 'Oh no, not another one!' But in the end they agreed to pay for the repairs. Within two weeks it was back on the road with a new bumper, grille and lights, but because no new one could be found, a used bonnet. My insurance premium doubled last time, so I'm expecting a similar increase."

The Midlands appears to be suffering the worst with what is known as 'car cannibalism'. Mark Silvester, of West Midlands Police, says although it's not yet a big issue, the rising cost of new replacement parts and the existence of an efficient online market to dispose of stolen ones mean it's one the force is monitoring.

"Unlike car theft, parts theft is an opportunistic crime rather than organised," said Silvester. "It is often carried out when someone has posted online that they're searching for a particular part. Motorists can help stamp it out by avoiding parts whose source is not legitimate or which are not sold under a scheme such as eBay's Certified Recycled scheme."

JOHN EVANS

Lillehammer
Cologne

Shooting Brake's range is only slightly down on the saloon's, at 473 miles

OFFICIAL PICTURES

MERC ADDS SHOOTING BRAKE TO LONG-LEGGED CLA LINE-UP

MERCEDES-BENZ HAS officially revealed its first electric estate: the CLA Shooting Brake.

The brand's long-range EV was launched in saloon form in March, but the Shooting Brake offers 50 litres more boot space than that car, at 455 litres.

This rear load volume is 30 litres down on that of the previous CLA wagon, but the addition of a frunk means overall luggage space is up by 71 litres. Rear passengers get an extra 26mm of head room over the standard CLA, too. It also has a 61mm-longer wheelbase than that of the previous generation.

The Shooting Brake shares its 85kWh battery with the standard car, for 473 miles of range (down 10 on the saloon). Power is 349bhp for the entry 250+, or 268bhp in 350 4Matic guise. Like the standard car, a 1.5-litre hybrid variant will arrive next year.

The Shooting Brake EV is likely to be priced about £1000 above the saloon, which starts at £45,615.

■ **CLA SALOON DRIVEN, P24**

Steve Cropley

THURSDAY AM

Did I ever say the Goodwood Festival of Speed was running out of steam? I might have uttered those words a year or two ago, but if so I was dead wrong. This year I went along for three of the four days, and more good things happened to me than ever – starting with a jaw-dropping sprint up the hillclimb as passenger to Porsche test driver (and GT racer) 'Quick Gabi' Jilkova, driving a still-disguised version of the forthcoming electric Cayenne that is reliably claimed to have 1000bhp and torque to match. It was a staggering experience: the car lay down a 0-62mph time of under three seconds. Our departure felt like an eruption, not mere acceleration.

We were on the hill for 50 seconds or so, during which I was able to glance at Gabi a couple of times to gauge whether she was enjoying herself. She was, which just increased the obvious chasm between her skill level and mine. I wouldn't have been able to think fast enough for this car, which does make you wonder at the case for concentrating such potential in the hands of the suits and family people who will buy them. Still, the way the Cayenne tore around that first, nameless double-apex right-hander off the start was wonderful. No question of the handling not matching the poke.

THURSDAY PM

The Goodwood Road Racing Club, to which I belong, invites great guests to do talks at Festival time: this time it was supposed to be design guru Adrian Newey with former Formula 1 driver and Indy 500 winner Danny Sullivan, but Adrian bailed at the last minute, perhaps preferring to avoid discussing the dismissal of Red Bull's Christian Horner. He was replaced by Haas F1 team principal Ayao Komatsu. Sullivan was as great as ever, but for me the brightest star was Komatsu who, unlike any other team principal, had personally demonstrated his F1 car on the hill. Somebody asked how he could cope with all those switches, lights and readouts, so obviously the domain of specialist drivers. "No problem," said Komatsu breezily. "I used to be the chief engineer. I put them there."

FRIDAY

At Goodwood I was a grateful guest of Porsche, which took over an estate that is home to a skills academy called West Dean College. They fed and entertained us in a tent village on the lawn, named Camp Targa to commemorate the fact that the 911 Targa is 40 years old, and they let us drive half a dozen Targas of differing ages to make the point. I drove enjoyably around for a while in a late-1980s Targa with a slightly raucous 3.2-litre air-cooled engine, and I found myself appreciating again the preference of many owners for radiator-less 911s.

Porsche set up camp with a collection of 911 Targas to celebrate the model's 40th

Upcoming Cayenne EV gave a memorable taxi ride up Goodwood's hill

> **"The sculpture was created with strident input from Murray"**

SATURDAY

Back to the show. I had some big interviews to do (more on those to come), and to expedite things, Porsche drove guests across the fields of West Dean, which abuts Goodwood, in V6 hybrid Cayennes. I've never really thought of this Porsche as a specialist off-roader, but its clearance, traction and supple air suspension made its capability obvious. It negotiated easily a rutted, precipitous downhill chalk track, and the ride comfort was especially good: I'm going to take more notice of these in future.

Believe it or not, this was my first chance to properly contemplate Goodwood's mighty central monument, commemorating the great Gordon Murray's 60 years of car design. It was officially the work of sculptor Gerry Judah, as usual, but grandly depicted Murray's mermaid motif and was created, so it's said, after strident input from Murray himself. With the Duke of Richmond, another forceful character, participating, discussions must have been lively.

AND ANOTHER THING

Two days before this mag hit the streets, we passed the centenary of Sir Malcolm Campbell's 150mph land speed record on Pendine Sands in South Wales. A few days ahead, a dinner in London's Bluebird cafe commemorated the event with (from left, above) Jon Murden, CEO of the National Motor Museum (Bluebird's home), Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and Don Wales, Campbell's grandson, as star guests.

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

What with the Ferrari F80 and Bugatti W16 Mistral tested on these pages last week and a Lotus Evija road test due next week, it feels like it might be time to revisit the question: 'How fast is too fast?'

I have a quote, which I've used before but I'll use again. "A Porsche 911 Turbo's limits are only attainable under conditions of total brain fade on the road," a copy of Autocar once said.

Was that written recently, about the latest and greatest four-wheel-drive 641bhp 911? No, it was in 1978, when the Turbo had less than half that power.

Cars have become inextricably faster since then, yet roads are far busier, their condition is worse and surveillance-by-public means that if you stayed on the throttle in a modern supercar for anything more than a few seconds, the crash would end up on Instagram in a moment and in a police force's Operation Snap inbox shortly after that.

In that environment, then, what's the benefit of having a new supercar/hypercar with 1184bhp (F80), or 1578bhp (Mistral), or 2013bhp (Evija)? No race track allows them to reach their top speeds and, as I think we correctly surmised in 1978, you couldn't use a quarter/fifth/seventh of the power on the road.

So I suppose the question is: do you need to use it all to be satisfied? After all, if 300bhp in a 50-year-old design and on the basic tyres of the time was considered too much, surely a modern hot hatchback with a little less power but sensational modern rubber would be too. But I don't remember ever saying, or reading, that exercising, for example, a Hyundai i30 N was unhinged. Even though doing so on the road would have been.

Super 3 lets you exploit most of its potential, which feels satisfying

And as a colleague once said about the McLaren P1 when I noted how easily you could exploit its handling on track despite its (then) outlandish 903bhp output: "The throttle's not a switch. You don't have to use it all."

But it feels to me – and I'd like to know whether it does to you too – that being able to use more of a car's performance and capability is somehow more satisfying than using less of it, even if ultimately you end up going at the same speed in both.

There will be more in this mag in the coming weeks about the Morgan Super 3, but I've just spent most of a week in one.

It has only 118bhp, and at times because it weighs so little you can't even use all of that. But still I find something especially rewarding about being able to get into the throttle and stay there, and know that on an empty roundabout I'm closer (albeit still not at) its grip limits, even though in terms of its ride and handling and steering and so many dynamic attributes, it's an objectively 'worse' car than big-company supercars/hypercars.

> **"The throttle's not a switch. You don't have to use it all"**

But while I'm still not touching the outer reaches of what the Morgan can do, I'm at maybe 60%, 65% of it. And that feels better, for reasons I'm still uncertain about, than using only 20% of what a car has.

I don't think supercar makers, whose buyers have until recently wanted the latest, fastest and most powerful models, have yet had to consider squaring this. But I wonder if the tide, lately, is turning, even if just a little.

I have some friends with fast cars who feel like they're not getting – or wouldn't get – the most out of the latest- and quickest-generation cars. So they're keeping what they have. Is this a trend?

If so, and if your business model is predicated on making new cars that are routinely more capable and quicker than their predecessors, what do you do?

I note that Ferrari is limiting torque in certain gears in some cars so that power feels like it builds more naturally. Each new 911 GT3 doesn't seem to be getting significantly more powerful than the last. And my understanding is that it's not like the latest 2000bhp-plus hypercars are exactly leaping off the shelves.

Maybe what we've been saying for nearly 50 years is starting to become an industry trend, and we're all realising cars are a bit too fast. Or maybe we'll come back next week to find that someone has launched a 3000bhp hypercar than can do 400mph.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

Is the tide starting to turn against cars like Bugatti's W16 Mistral?

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Oliver Rowland heads into this weekend's Formula E London finale as champion

Formula E returns to London for its annual double-header season climax this weekend, but there won't be a title decider to play out on the part-indoor track at the Excel arena: Britain's Oliver Rowland is already world champion after a zero to hero weekend in Berlin earlier this month.

The 32-year-old Nissan driver crashed into Maserati's Stoffel Vandoorne in the opening wet race in the German capital, earning himself a five-place grid penalty for the second one. But on a dry Sunday, Rowland quickly banished the faux pas with a combative drive to fourth place. That was enough to wrap up the title with two rounds to spare following a fantastically dominant season for the Barnsley-born ace. Four wins and three second places from the first nine races made this title a foregone conclusion, against the grain of what usually plays out in the highly competitive electric-powered series. On pure merit, Rowland deserved a shot at Formula 1 earlier in his racing life but, like so many before and since, it never fell his way. Now at least he can savour the vindication of branding the title of world champion forever against his name.

CADDY'S WORLD FIRST

Meanwhile at Interlagos in Brazil, the Kent-based Jota team was sent into rapture after delivering Cadillac its first victory in the World Endurance Championship. At Le Mans in June, hopes of a Caddy victory at the biggest race of the year quickly evaporated after Alex Lynn's stunning pole position. But at the first WEC race since the 24 Hours, Lynn, Will Stevens and Norman Nato proved unstoppable as they led the sister Caddy driven by Earl Bamber, Jenson Button and Sébastien Bourdais for an Anglo-American 1-2.

This was a big result all round, not least for the WEC itself, which, despite the amazing depth of manufacturer Hypercar interest, has been dominated by Ferrari, unbeaten this term before São Paulo. As is the way in modern endurance racing, such success led to a severe pegging back via the Balance of Performance formula. The Ferrari 499Ps were hit by a power cut amounting to nearly 50bhp plus a weight gain of 27kg over Le Mans levels, which rendered the runaway series leaders uncompetitive. Le Mans winners Robert Kubica, Phil Hanson and Yifei Ye finished as the best of the Ferraris, down in eighth.

> **"It seems Christian Horner really didn't see it coming"**

We've said it before: without BoP this wonderful era of sports car racing wouldn't be happening. But the system and how it manipulates form always raises questions over the authenticity of what we're watching. Recently, Toto Wolff said BoP was the reason why Mercedes won't be joining the Hypercar frenzy. Imagine such a system in Formula 1: the griping and political infighting would be off the scale.

Chevron gets a salute at Oulton Park Gold Cup meet

HORNER'S DOWNFALL

Speaking of such toxicity, Christian Horner will still be feeling the burn in the aftermath of his sudden sacking as Red Bull F1 team chief. Sympathy was notable by its absence, for a figure who has never been shy about courting – and often stoking – infamy. One headline even stated it boldly: apparently, Horner had it coming.

Speculation was rife: schisms within both the Red Bull hierarchy and Max Verstappen's camp; poor decisions on driver hirings, such as the re-signing of Sergio Pérez last year that only led to an expensive pay-off when the Mexican predictably fell well short of requirements; and the lingering stain of Horner's alleged behaviour towards a female employee, despite two internal enquiries clearing him. His downfall probably resulted from an amalgam of factors, and in the best traditions of such corporate 'whackings', it seems he really didn't see it coming.

I've known Horner for 25 years, from the days in his family-run Formula 3000 team. Privately, he was and is good company, with a genuine love and understanding of his sport. His naked ambition was always obvious, but F1 people need that to succeed. And by signing Adrian Newey he made what was probably his biggest contribution to the stunning success of Red Bull these past 20 years. F1 is in his blood. It's hard to imagine he won't return in some capacity, in time.

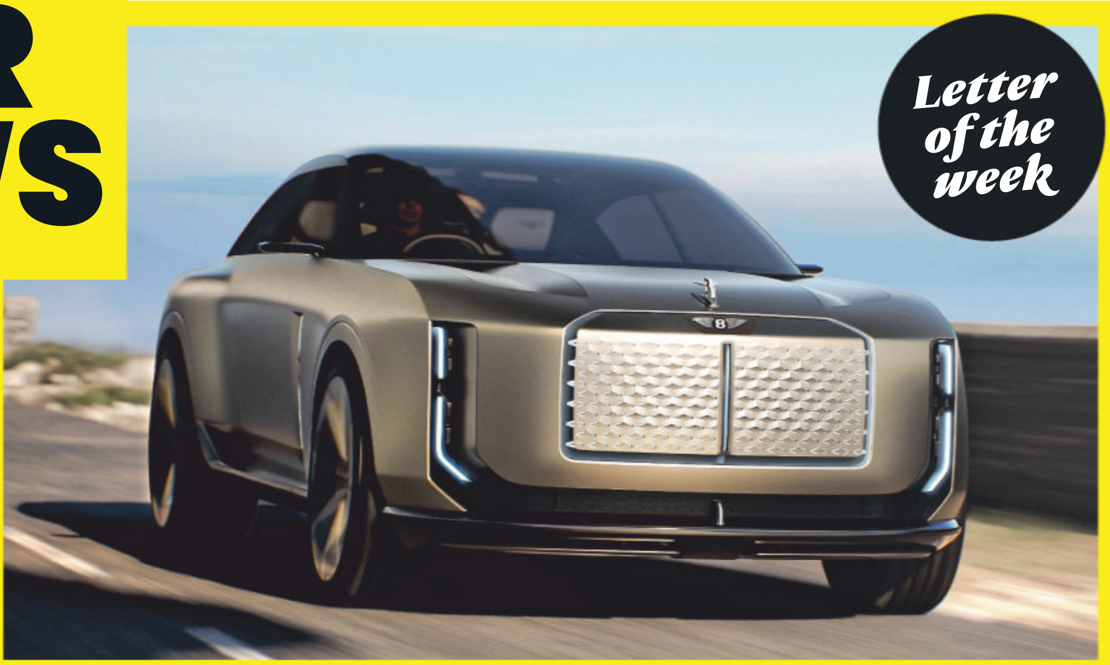
RACING GOLD

I've had a soft spot for Chevron racing cars ever since my teenage 'gofer' days for historic racer Michael Schryver, which is why I'll be heading to Oulton Park for this weekend's Gold Cup. The 60th anniversary of the late Derek Bennett's marque will be a major theme, with at least a dozen Chevrons lining up for the HSCC's Guards Trophy race, plus a smattering in the single-seater classes. I wouldn't miss it for anything.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week



THAT'S NO BENTLEY

Goodness, that EXP 15 concept is a pig-ugly creation. What was Bentley – or more specifically its design chief, Robin Page – thinking? Not only does it ape (unsuccessfully) the latest Jaguar design language but it also totally lacks any homage to the typical Bentley hallmarks of elegance, style, proportions, unmistakable classic nose and exquisite detailing.

It really does not excite me at all from any angle. There are too many elements that collectively do not blend well together. The rear light treatment is Polestar-inspired, the side silhouette is clearly Audi RS6 Avant and the nose mimics a bee hotel. It's like a pick 'n' mix that ignores everything that the Bentley brand embodies.

And this design fail extends to the interior too, where the luxury and elegance has been replaced by the Scandi- and Chinese-inspired cabin. And what is that camping light doing in the central armrest?

We have all seen the way Jaguar (disastrously) scored an own goal recently. Now please, Bentley, kick this EXP 15 down the street and replace it with something that looks like a Bentley and is worthy of the brand. You seriously need to up your game and employ better designers.

Peter Hill, via email

LOYALTY MATTERS

Your conversation with Skoda CEO Klaus Zellmer (Grapevine, 9 July) certainly caught me eye.

Five of my past six cars have been Skodas, but I'm very determined that my current one will be my last. The reason is straightforward. All my Skodas have been bought from a wonderful – friendly and professional – family-owned dealer who have partnered the brand for over 20 years, invested in their site and won numerous customer service awards from Skoda. But when I was last in for a service in April, they told me that would be my last Skoda service with them, as they've been terminated by the brand as part of a wider Volkswagen Group cull of many long-standing dealers in Northern Ireland. I will now have to travel at least 20 miles for a service with a dealer with whom I've no prior relationship.

Frankly, the reason I don't want to buy another Skoda is down to two matters: Skoda's apparently ruthless treatment of good people and that, given how very little Skoda appears to value brand partners, I find it very hard to believe it values me as a customer.

Colin Neill
Northern Ireland

WOMAN TO WOMAN

I was very interested to read the article regarding how women feel patronised and unwelcome in car showrooms (News, 18 June).

I can totally relate to this. A few years ago, I went to collect my new C-HR from a local Toyota showroom. The salesman completely ignored me when I walked in but put his hand out to shake my husband's hand and welcome him to collect his new car. I had to interject and introduce myself as the customer collecting my new car.

Fast forward to now and a totally different experience from start to finish when choosing and collecting my new Hyundai Kona from Tates of Brighton. We were welcomed by a friendly young woman who was able to answer all our queries in a professional and knowledgeable manner.

After I ordered the car, Gemma kept me informed regarding my order, which arrived last week. She helped us complete the paperwork quickly and professionally so that we could get on with driving away in our new car. She sat with us for ages in the car, patiently explaining the controls and helping us set up the Hyundai Bluelink and Apple CarPlay. She was able to answer all our questions in a non-patronising manner, just totally professional.

Gemma made the whole experience a joy, which in the past I have to admit I have found boring and mundane.

I hope dealerships start to see the benefits of employing women.

Ali C
Hove, East Sussex

Gemma went the extra mile helping Ali get to know her new Kona

No small MPV beats the Tourneo Connect these days, reckons Simon

ONLY CONNECT

Owning a previous-generation Ford Tourneo Connect, I was interested to read your road test of the new Volkswagen Caddy-based plug-in hybrid option (2 July).

We have been looking at replacement options for our current one and have looked at all of the rivals you mentioned. Sadly, your list gives a rather inaccurate portrayal of the true situation. The Peugeot Rifter is now available only as an EV, from £32k. Citroën and Vauxhall do still offer ICE MPV options, from £24k, but in both cases they are classed as light commercial vehicles. This brings limitations on speed limits, taxation and insurance etc, and means they come fitted with a fixed steel mesh bulkhead behind the rear seats, so they can't be used to carry loads (wheelchair models excepted).

The Dacia Jogger is a potential competitor; however, owners' forums paint a worrying picture of reliability, especially for the hybrid version.

In conclusion, the Ford and its Volkswagen relation seem to be unique in this category at present. Consequently I can see the PHEV model presenting us with a very interesting option – even in spite of its premium pricing.

Simon Miller
Via email

Some EO-brand chargers will lose smart capabilities

NOT SO SMART NOW

EO has just announced that it will discontinue the app that controls its popular Mini Pro 2 EV charger, meaning the charger will no longer support timed charging, which makes use of cheaper energy tariffs such as Octopus Go. The company explained to me that "the introduction of the UK Smart

Charge Points Regulations in June 2022 means that the EO Mini Pro 2 no longer meets the necessary smart functionality requirements for sale or replacement in Great Britain". I'm absolutely furious.

Richard Fox
Via email

These regulations stipulate that smart chargers must meet certain device-level requirements regarding smart functionality; electricity supplier interoperability; continued charging even if the charger becomes disconnected from a communications network; health and safety provisions; measurement of electricity; and cybersecurity requirements – KC

BRITISH OR CHINESE?

Bentley's new EXP 15 concept has a lovely interior, but the exterior design is a hideous, clunky, brash, incoherent mish-mash. The exterior designers should be utterly ashamed of this monstrosity.

Surely rich Chinese buy Bentleys because they look British, understated and sophisticated, with a century of heritage to draw on, and not because they look like a clumsily designed domestic car from a manufacturer that appeared last week.

Nick Tod
Via autocar.co.uk

NEW PEOPLE'S CAR

Seeing the Bentley EXP 15 concept, I wonder why manufacturers don't join forces and make one single car model. That way, you could just switch the badge to whichever manufacturer you prefer. It has never been more boring to be a car enthusiast than now.

Claus Trøstrup Nørgaard
Via Facebook

BENTLEY'S JAGUAR

I think the Bentley EXP 15 is a very interesting piece of design, if not a beautiful one. For what it's worth, I think its purpose is to show a generalised direction, not a literal future car. We will see elements of this design study appear on future Bentleys – the light signature, the wraparound rear bar, the framing of the rear wings. It also has a whiff of futuristic Jensen Interceptor about it to my eye. The angles of the rear roofline in particular.

Curious how there are similarities between this and the recent Jaguar Type 00 concept.

'Orange Prose'
Via autocar.co.uk

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 30 JULY

FEATURE

THE UK'S 50 BEST USED CARS

We name the shrewd, must-have second-hand buys, including BMW i3, Dacia Duster, Ford Focus ST, Land Rover Defender and Mazda MX-5

ROAD TEST

LOTUS EVIJA TAKES ON THE STOPWATCH AND WINS

Don't miss the most eye-popping verified performance figures in at least three decades – or quite possibly ever. But is it also a good car?

INTERVIEW

THE MAN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HIGH-END BMWs

Former Polestar design boss Maximilian Missoni is now responsible for the next generation of Alpinas and large BMWs. He tells us his plans

EVERY WEEK

MY CAR & I

TOYOTA MR2

Low-mileage Mk1 is a daily driver – and its owner has installed a coffee machine in its tiny boot...

LIVING WITH A...

USED TESLA MODEL 3

Can this big-seller hold its own as a used car or does it now feel outdated? Read our final verdict

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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FIRST DRIVES

THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS

28 HONDA PRELUDE

33 ASTON VANQUISH

34 SKODA ENYAQ vRS

36 MG S5 EV

HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 3.7.25, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK **ON SALE** SUMMER

MERCEDES-BENZ CLA

Smallest car in the new-era line-up is a landmark EV for efficiency, but is there more to its appeal than that?

Four hundred and eighty-three miles. That makes this new Mercedes-Benz CLA the longest-range EV you can buy in the UK, surpassing the firm's other streamlined saloon, the EQS. Even when you remove the 'in the UK' qualifier, you need to look to the Lucid Air Touring to go further on a single charge.

But that range is only really a by-product of the thing that could make the CLA a landmark car, which is its efficiency.

The EQS and the Lucid are very expensive, very large cars with massive batteries, whereas the CLA isn't. It costs from £45,615, which is only as much as a long-range Tesla Model 3, and instead of taking the brute force and ignorance route towards achieving a longer range by just fitting an enormous battery pack, Mercedes has gone to town on maximising the number of miles the CLA squeezes from every unit of energy. The result is a WLTP rating of 5.0mpkWh. When some rivals are muddling around in the 3s, that seems game-changing and it means that its averagely large battery pack of 85kWh gives a properly impressive range.

Doing more with less seems like rather an obvious idea, doesn't it? Particularly with an EV, the implications are huge, because a smaller battery is cheaper and lighter, it charges faster and it uses fewer precious resources. But the reality of achieving it, of course, is more complicated.

To that end, the CLA starts from more or less a clean-sheet design. It introduces a brand-new platform, rather than building on that of the EQS and EQE. It represents quite a departure for Mercedes, which has thus far kept its electric and combustion platforms separate. This new architecture supports both, being primarily designed for EVs, with hybrid options to follow. The same applies, naturally, to future SUV derivatives. ▸

TESTER'S NOTE

The CLA has pop-out door handles, but unlike those in the latest Audis, Volvos and Teslas, they use cables to unlatch the door because Mercedes doesn't trust purely electronic mechanisms to still work in the event that a freak accident takes out the 12V power. That seems sensible to me. **IV**

CLA 250+
S CA 5416E

CLA 250+ uses one motor at the rear; dual-motor CLA 350 is on the way too

Although catering to different propulsion concepts is in some ways a compromise, it does allow Mercedes to build them all on the same line in Rastatt, Germany, and therefore be more flexible in its response to fluctuating demand. It also introduces 800V, which allows for thinner cabling and very fast charging – up to 320kW.

The big technical innovation is in the motor. It's developed in-house and tightly integrated with the silicon-carbide inverter. The headline news is that main motor at the rear drives through a two-speed gearbox. The Porsche Taycan employs something similar to improve acceleration, but the point in the CLA is efficiency.

Although electric motors have a much wider powerband than engines, it's not infinite either, so having multiple gears to equalise performance and consumption at town and motorway speeds makes sense. But it adds complication and ensuring the gearchanges are smooth isn't the work of a moment. Given this sort of tech isn't available off the shelf from a supplier, most manufacturers don't bother but, according to the engineers, Mercedes' in-house expertise in making automatic gearboxes for ICE cars (most rivals buy these in from ZF, Aisin, Getrag and the like) has given it an edge here.

The CLA will be launched in the UK in rear-drive CLA 250+ form, with a four-wheel-drive CLA 350 4Matic to follow later. Many dual-motor EVs use an asynchronous motor on the front because it is able to freewheel when not in use, but the 350 uses another synchronous motor, albeit with a clutch, because that's even more efficient. At some point, there will also be an entry-level CLA with a 58kWh LFP battery.

Completing the efficiency puzzle are the aerodynamics. A basic CLA with small wheels has a drag coefficient of 0.21, and even if you go for an AMG Line with big wheels (as most buyers in the UK are likely to), it only rises to 0.24. That's thanks to the slippery body shape and aero covers on not just the wheels but also the bottoms of the suspension control arms.

So has it worked? Based on this first test, I'd say it has. In admittedly perfect circumstances for an EV, my CLA 250+ in AMG Line returned 4.8mpkWh. That's pretty unheard of and means it's good for a real-world 408 miles. What's perhaps even more impressive is that the CLA 350, despite its additional motor, did barely any worse, which is very unusual for a dual-motor version.

The electric CLA aces objective number one, then, but what about the rest? The interior is the latest evolution of Mercedes' current style, which isn't a universally good thing. The fascia really puts the 'board' in dashboard, with a near-vertical gloss black panel that incorporates the 10.3in driver display, the 14in centre touchscreen and optionally another 14in touchscreen for the passenger. There's something novel about the sheer cliff face of tech, though the amount of gloss black and scratchy plastic doesn't exactly shout 'premium'.

CLA's distinctive front end is part of Mercedes' new design approach

The software is new too, though it generally looks familiar and works in much the same way as other recent Mercedes. The home screen is a big map (which now takes in data from Google for more accurate traffic info), with a widget for the media and a permanent toolbar at the bottom for the climate control and a few shortcuts.

This puts most of the important functions only one or two taps away, and there is a small but well-chosen selection of physical buttons. One exception is the heated seats, which are inexplicably buried in a menu. You could, of course, use the new extra-clever voice control, which employs both ChatGPT and Google Gemini AI to formulate its answers, but such things should really have a button for when you don't want to interrupt your music.

The voice assistant can supposedly do things like make dinner reservations, but it wasn't

"My CLA 250+ returned 4.8mpkWh. That's pretty unheard of and means it's good for 408 miles"

Driving position is lower than in other Merc EVs but space isn't generous

CHARGER ISSUE

There was some pre-launch hubbub about how the CLA will be unable to use many older chargers. Its 800V architecture allows it to charge at up to 320kW, but only on 800V chargers. Many older units that deliver 150kW or less and all of Tesla's current Superchargers use 400V. Contrary to earlier reports, a built-in step-down that allows it to charge on 400V units will be available, but only from next year as an option.

Being unable to use 400V chargers is unlikely to stop you getting where you need to be, given the CLA's big range, the decent availability of 800V chargers and the way the nav can route you via working chargers: it knows which ones you can use and which are busy, broken or not delivering their stated power. That said, the infrastructure still doesn't give you an embarrassment of choice, so it's odd that Mercedes has made EV driving that bit more inconvenient.

Charging options
Service
Estimated end of charging
10:37 - 00:45
Maximum state of charge
Battery information

even able to tell me how busy the chargers at Cobham services were. If it doesn't know car-related things like that, I wouldn't trust it to do anything more complicated than turn on the heated seats.

The seats themselves are comfortable and give you a reasonably low driving position if you want. The perched feeling of the EQE and plenty of other electric saloons is absent here. However, it does feel surprisingly small inside. It's only slightly smaller than a BMW i4 on the outside, but it feels more hemmed in inside. Rear-seat space is just about adequate for a tall adult, and there are 405 litres of boot space, plus a 101-litre frunk (though you have to pull a lever to open it). A more practical Shooting Brake estate will follow soon after the saloon.

If the CLA struggles to pull off a junior luxury car vibe inside, it strikes back with the way it goes down the road, which is impressively mature and cohesive – exactly what you would expect from a Mercedes, even a small one.

It's quick enough, and like a Taycan the only time you can perceive the gearchange is under full-bore acceleration. Most owners will never know about the tech underneath.

A new brake-by-wire system means the spongy, inconsistent response of previous electrified Mercedes has been banished. Instead, it feels perfectly normal. The company has devised a novel way of controlling the level of regen: you push and pull the column-mounted drive selector to cycle between freewheeling, medium, one-pedal and adaptive modes. It works just as well as paddles.

Rear-wheel drive means the steering is nicely uncorrupted, while its medium weight and pacing just blend into the background. In a similar vein, the passive coil suspension doesn't try to completely cover up the road's topography, but it's well controlled and damped, giving it an expensive, calm feel. Noise isolation at speed is impressive too, allowing the driver a good chance of dispatching those 400 miles in one sitting.

On dry roads, the rear-drive version never struggled for traction, and the four-wheel-drive one just felt slightly faster. As on other Mercedes, the adaptive cruise control is very smooth and alert, and the more annoying ADAS features are easy to disable.

The new CLA is quite the landmark car for Mercedes, and European car manufacturers in general. It finally manages to take on the Tesla Model 3 on its home turf – efficiency, range and charging – and win. With that, it's streets ahead of anything BMW, Hyundai, Kia, BYD or anyone else, really, has to offer. Not only that, but it's at a price point that isn't notably higher than the Tesla.

With styling that's never going to be mistaken for a Bruno Sacco design and an interior that is a little generic, I'm not sure the CLA is reviving the desirability that has been lacking in recent Mercedes. Technically and for the way it drives, though, this is the most impressive car I've driven this year.

ILLYA VERPRAET

Wheel design is part of an aero effort that results in a 0.21 Cd

Glass roof aids an airy feel yet the interior isn't convincingly premium

TECH SPEC

MERCEDES CLA 250+ WITH EQ TECHNOLOGY AMG LINE EDITION

Takes the EV game to the next level with its efficiency, range and charging. The real deal elsewhere, too, and well priced

Price £49,375
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 268bhp
Torque 247lb ft
Gearbox 2-spd automatic, RWD
Kerb weight 1980kg
0-62mph 6.7sec
Top speed 130mph
Battery 85kWh (usable)
Range, economy 483 miles, 5.0mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals BMW i4, Polestar 2, Tesla Model 3

TESTED 11.7.25, THRUXTON **DELIVERIES** EARLY 2026

HONDA PRELUDE

Prototype reveals latest take on firm's innovative petrol-electric tech

The Honda Prelude is back. Almost. It's at Thruxton as a prototype and been driven for a few minutes only, enough to get us used to its new hybrid drivetrain.

It uses the engine as a generator for its electric drive motor, rather than to power the wheels, so in that respect it's a bit like in the Civic but supposedly more engaging.

The Civic donates the Prelude its architecture, plus its 2.0-litre Atkinson-cycle engine and a drive system, dubbed e:HEV.

It's worth spending a bit of time on this because it's not straightforward. When the Civic first arrived, Honda used the term e-CVT, or something like that, somewhat misleadingly.

An electric motor of around 180bhp (precise figure to be confirmed) drives the front wheels, with the engine generating its electricity. But Honda thinks that an electric motor alone offers insufficient driver interaction, and that an engine revving at a constant speed is particularly annoying.

So on the Civic there's a system that simulates gearshifts. The engine revs change, seemingly as they do in a conventional automatic petrol car. But you can't control those revs, and there is no actual gearbox. It just sounds like there is.

Drive is almost entirely electric, but the Prelude's powertrain is engaging

The Prelude moves this system on. Dubbed S+Shift, it not only mimics an eight-speed transmission but also lets you pick which fake gear ratio you're in, via gearshift paddles. This means it feels like any conventional flappy-paddle automatic, the significant difference being that the engine isn't connected to the wheels.

At least, not usually. But as with the Civic (and I think this is where some of the early confusion came), there is one fixed ratio in which a lock-up clutch is engaged and the engine does drive the wheels. With the Prelude it's eighth gear. It won't connect every time you're in eighth, but if it does, that's the ratio in which it will happen. Most of the time, though, this is an electric motor-driven car.

The Prelude is Civic-based but

TESTER'S NOTE

Brake feel is good and firm, switching from regeneration to the physical discs seemingly seamlessly. **MP**

with a slightly shorter wheelbase. The suspension hardware is mostly Civic Type R, but the spring rate and anti-roll bar stiffness is "decreased in the direction of comfort", according to Tomoyuki Yamagami, Honda's large-project leader for the Prelude. Tyres are less aggressive than those on the Type R too, being 235/40 R19 Continental Premium Contact 6s on our test car.

Weight has yet to be confirmed but is in the region of 1450-1500kg, and it will be more rear-biased than in a Civic Type R because there is more hardware towards the back.

We didn't spend long examining the cabin: I got in, got comfortable and pressed 'D'. But getting comfortable was easy, the steering wheel feels pleasingly sportif and the instrument pack is clear.

There are three drive modes – Comfort, GT and Sport – which change the steering and damping and the augmented (but still real) engine noise. If you pick GT or Sport rather than Comfort you get a rev counter in the dials. And there's a big S+ button on the dash. Otherwise it's all quite Honda-ish.

Instruments reconfigure depending on drive mode; paddles allow fake gearshifts

> "The Prelude is less tied-down than a Civic Type R, but it turns nicely and hangs on well"

Suspension firms up noticeably in the sportier drive modes

The drivetrain's final details are still to come, but the short of it is that the system works well. Drive is smooth, but the engine note and revs are convincingly authentic – extremely so, in fact.

This shouldn't be a surprise: the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N could have you convinced it has a real engine and gearbox, but it has neither. At least this has an actual engine. There's nothing outwardly sporting about it, though, because it does its best work in the mid-range and only spins to 6000rpm.

Upshifts are incredibly smooth – because they don't exist. Downshifts too, because nothing mechanical changes in the transmission. But shifting will be second nature to anyone who has driven a combustion car before, or who has spent time with a racing game. I know it's not real, but there is something about a sound, particularly on a circuit, that gives you cues about your speed.

You don't have to have driven a Type R recently to feel that the Prelude is set up more comfortably. It's meant to be a daily driver, they say. Scroll through the drive modes and the dampers do get firmer and the steering does get heavier, but this Prelude is still a car that rolls in corners so you can lean on it.

Thruxton's undulations, if taken at speed, do expose some loose body movements. Nothing excessive, but if you think this core Prelude is going to be a Type R replacement, think otherwise. It's more habitable and less tied-down than not only a Type R but also, I think, a Toyota GR86.

Still, it turns nicely, tips into corners with some agility and hangs on well. But our drive was short and primarily about the drivetrain, so we'll give the dynamics more attention later in our own time.

A Civic, as I write, costs £35,000-£40,000; I wouldn't be surprised if the Prelude was a bit more. We may get a bit of a steer about pricing after the car goes on sale in Japan in September, but official UK prices won't appear until towards the end of the year, at which point we'll be able to tell you more.

MATT PRIOR

TECH SPEC

HONDA PRELUDE

The Prelude returns. Prototype suggests super-smooth drivetrain, more habitability and less dynamism than a Civic Type R

Price £45,000 (est)
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1993cc, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 180bhp (est)
Torque 230lb ft (est)
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1475kg (est)
0-62mph 8.0sec (est)
Top speed 115mph (est)
Economy 56mpg (est)
CO_2, tax band 105g/km (est), 27% (est)
Rivals Mini John Cooper Works, Toyota GR86

TESTED 10.7.25, RHINELAND, GERMANY **DELIVERIES** FIRST HALF OF 2026

MAZDA 6E

Japanese brand endeavours to fulfil its electric saloon obligation

Many of us would love for Mazda to keep merrily making MX-5s and a supporting cast of sensibly sized hatchbacks with zingy petrol engines and manual gearboxes, maybe with a couple of straight-six diesels thrown in. But the powers that be have decreed otherwise: whether it wants to or not, the brand needs a credible electric vehicle (the MX-30 has charm but not much else).

If you're BMW, you can counter any legislative flip-flopping by betting on all the horses: petrol, diesel, hybrid, electric, tick off hydrogen just in case. But Mazda just doesn't have the engineering might to do all of it well. So for its new 6e, it has turned to its Chinese manufacturing partner Changan and Mazdafied the Deepal SL03.

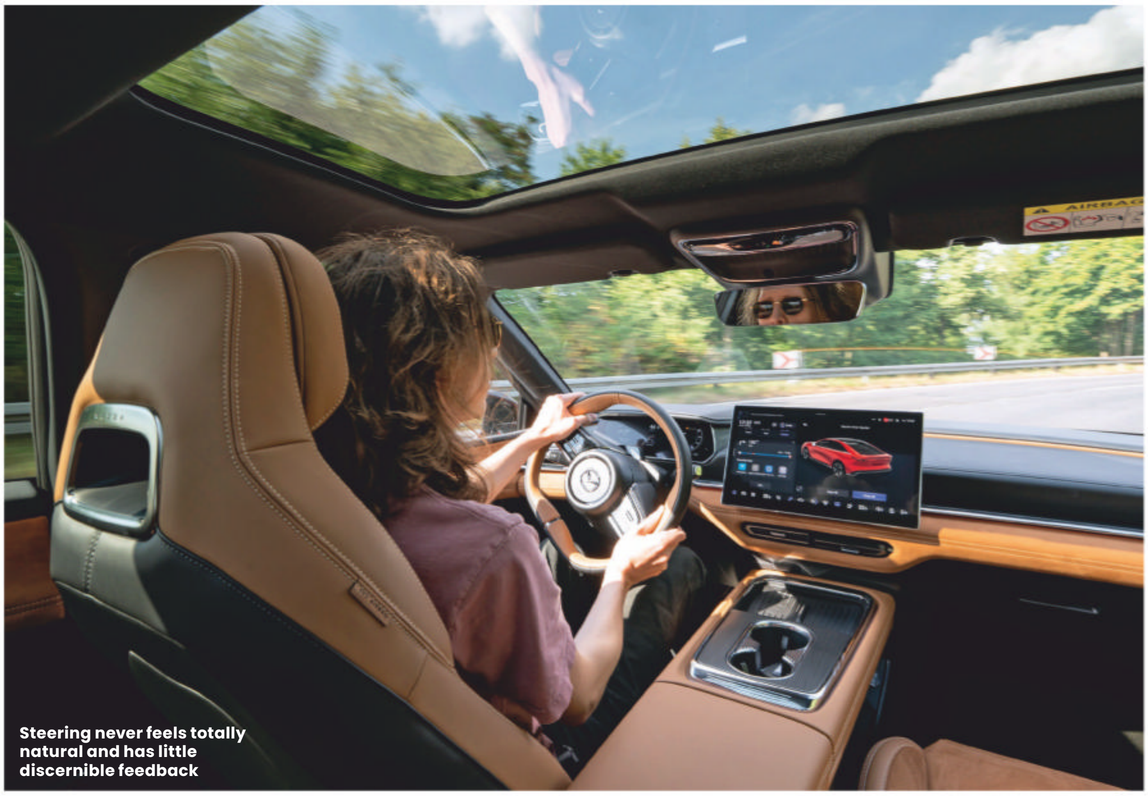
It must be said that, design-wise, it started in a pretty good place, because unless you're already aware of the SL03 (and if you live in Europe, why would you be?), you couldn't tell this wasn't originally conceived as a Mazda. With the long, flat bonnet, flowing sides and elegant silhouette, it looks every bit the natural successor to the much-loved third-generation Mazda 6 that went off sale in 2023.

The way the signature Mazda grille has been integrated is pretty neat, too: the lights that peek through the relatively flat bumper create the illusion of a more three-dimensional piece. At the back, there's a deployable spoiler and four round lights that reference other Mazdas, such as the FD RX-7.

Test car's leather and suede trim is nice, but rear space is compromised

Reading through the spec sheet, though, makes you scratch your head a bit. There are two battery options: a big NMC (80kWh, 343 miles WLTP) and a smaller LFP (68.8kWh, 298 miles WLTP). Pretty standard stuff, but weirdly, the Long Range charges much more slowly (90kW versus 165kW) and has less power (241bhp versus 255bhp) from its single rear motor.

A 45-mile range difference is not insignificant, particularly given that Mercedes-Benz will now sell you a CLA with a 483-mile range (see p24). But given the difference in charging speed, and the fact that LFP batteries don't mind being charged to 100% on a regular basis, you wonder why anyone would go



Steering never feels totally natural and has little discernible feedback

Mazda's design language is expressed convincingly well in the shape of the 6e

for the more expensive one. Mazda must realise this, because the one we got to drive on the launch was the standard range model.

Open the pleasingly weighty door with its frameless window and what faces you is clearly a big departure from existing Mazdas. Instead of an array of buttons, a small screen and lots of interesting shapes, you get a huge touchscreen adorning an otherwise fairly plain dashboard. Judging by the new CX-5, which is a complete Mazda original, the brand is clearly happy to go down this route, but whichever your preference, it must be said that something of what normally sets Mazda apart is being lost.

To Mazda's credit, you can see where it has put the effort in to differentiate the 6e from the SL03 source material. In the Takumi Plus trim of our test car, there is lots of nice caramel-coloured leather and suede, which give a pretty classy feel. Standard Takumi trim gets synthetic leather in either beige or black.

> **"Open the pleasingly weighty door and what faces you is a big departure from existing Mazdas"**

Active spoiler and neat round lights make for a tidy enough rear end

Conversely, being able to see what Mazda has managed to change means you can also clearly spot what couldn't be altered. This is exemplified by – stick with me here – typography. Mazda has quite a distinctive, classical font that it uses across its website, literature and the infotainment of its 'own' cars. In the 6e, it pops up here and there, but its application isn't consistent. Instead, it's mixed with more generic letters and numbers.

All the screens feel very Chinese. Like many BYDs, Jaecoos, Oras and the like, a lot of information, widgets, icons and graphics are displayed with little sense of hierarchy, which makes it all harder to use on the move than it should be. I've tried much worse: here there's Apple CarPlay, the climate controls are in a permanent toolbar at ▸

TESTER'S NOTE

Accelerator response is weirdly non-linear. Just a few degrees of the pedal give you about a quarter of the power, and there's a delay between matting the pedal and getting full power. There's a freewheeling mode, and a couple of light regen settings, but these also have a delay to them. **IV**

MAZDA
6e
LEV E 613E

The 6e rides okay, but it's devoid of hoped-for rear-drive dynamism

◂ the bottom of the screen and it's pretty responsive, but none of it is particularly pleasing. Mazda likes to talk of craftsmanship, but this has cheap Android phone vibes.

The driving position reminds me of that in the Genesis Electrified G80: you're slightly too high in relation to the controls and your head is in the rafters, but because there's enough adjustability and a comfortable seat, you get used to it. Rear-seat passengers have ample knee room, but a high floor and a low roof mean it's not as accommodating as it seems at first. The boot is quoted at just 336 litres, although it seems like more, and there's a 72-litre frunk with a handy fitted removable basket.

You don't press a start button, instead you just get in, pull the knock-off last-gen Mercedes drive selector and go. Here, too, there was clearly a limit on how much Mazda's engineers could do. You might say the ride is faintly reminiscent of a CX-60 in the way the relatively settled long-wave motions are punctuated by a slightly wooden secondary ride, but then that's not entirely a compliment. It's quiet at a cruise, though, and rear-wheel drive promises some dynamism.

Except it doesn't fully materialise. The steering has two settings: eerily light and disconnected, or heavier yet slightly gloopy but with no more feedback. Weirdly, it's always quite heavy at parking speeds. Body roll is present but well contained and the balance is okay, although the Michelin e-Primacy eco tyres are pretty vocal when you pitch it into a bend. The steering means you're generally disinclined to, though.

As is the way with Chinese cars, there are reams of confusingly named ADAS features, and preserving your sanity means working your way through a long menu. They're not as intrusive as some, and on first impression the adaptive cruise control works fairly well, but the unholy trinity of lane keep assist, overspeed warning and driver monitoring still annoy.

If the trip computer is to be believed, the 6e returned 4.0mpkWh on a mixed drive. That's pretty good, although Mazda says the usable battery capacity is "around 66kWh", so that still only makes for 264 miles of range. I'm also slightly sceptical, since the WLTP claim is only 3.7mpkWh, and I don't think I've ever driven an EV that beats its claimed efficiency on anything approaching a representative run.

We'll give it the benefit of the doubt until we can do a more thorough test, but it will be a few months before we get our hands on one in the UK. Even though the 6e has been in production for a while already (for the Chinese market), right-hand-drive production is only coming later, so UK cars are planned in the first half of next year. It's much too early for prices. In Germany, it undercuts the (much longer-range) Volkswagen ID 7, Mercedes CLA and Polestar 2 but not the standard-range Tesla Model 3.

That sounds about right, because while Mazda has done a decent job at putting a classy Japanese wallpaper over an otherwise fairly average and generic electric saloon, it couldn't completely cover up the lumps and bumps of the base car, which doesn't do anything especially well amid a field of talented rivals.

ILLYA VERPRAET

Headlight and grille treatment gives the 6e a Mazda family face

TECH SPEC

MAZDA 6E STANDARD RANGE TAKUMI PLUS

Pleasant enough, but good styling, caramel leather and some finessing of the details can't mask a fundamentally quite average car

Price £40,500 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 255bhp
Torque 236lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 1962kg
0-62mph 7.6sec
Top speed 109mph
Battery 68.8/66kWh (total/est usable)
Range, economy 298 miles, 3.7mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Polestar 2, Mercedes-Benz CLA EQ

TESTER'S NOTE
Aston reckons only around 400 Volantes will be made, which is a massive shame for you, me and anyone with eyes and ears. **MSc**

TESTED 1.7.25, NORTH YORKSHIRE **DELIVERIES** LATE 2025

ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH VOLANTE

UK test of Gaydon's V12-powered super-GT in top-down Volante guise

It's 90kg heavier. Anti-roll bar stiffness and rear spring rates have been upped by 7%. And the roof goes up and down. There you go: the material differences between the coupé and Volante.

The Volante's underlying structure, confirms Aston's chief engineer Simon Newton, is in effect the same as the coupé's. Newton is also keen to note that the weight gain is from underbody bracing, which helps make this roofless Vanquish some 75% stiffer laterally than the DBS Volante it replaces. Weight distribution is now slightly closer to 50:50 front to rear, too.

The Vanquish is not a small car, though. It weighs a shade over two tonnes at the kerb, so that 90kg really makes no material difference. This is a £360,000, 5.2-litre V12-engined, 2.0-metre-wide super-GT-cum-supercar that signifies a certain taste, lifestyle and significant wealth.

And yet… It's delicate. The roof stacks very tightly with a super-low lid, so it doesn't ruin the lines of that gorgeous Kamm-tail rear end. Newton says the roof-up articulation index (apparently a measure of speech intelligibility – in other words, how easy it is to have a chat while motoring along) is low, which is very good.

Elsewhere inside you'll find Apple's new Ultra system: Tim Cook's tentacles now extend from the infotainment screen to the driver's display. Climate controls on the infotainment are controlled by Apple, but Aston also has physical cylindrical rollers that control cabin temperature and fan speed. Saying that, the temperature control is permanently synced to the left-hand side of the infotainment screen. It is overlaid on everything, which means if you're on an app that has some info down the left-hand side – Google Maps' speed warning, for instance – you can't see it. Aston says a fix is in the works.

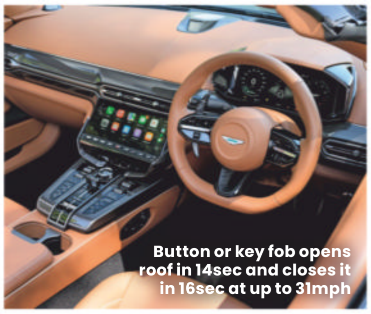
The V12's 824bhp and 738lb ft means 214mph is achievable. The 0-62mph time of 3.4sec almost seems quaint compared with today's 1000bhp four-wheel-drive EVs. But only almost. Insanely fast EVs make it feel like the world is hurtling towards you in an impassive way over which you have no control. With this V12 you are actively dragging everything that's in front out of the way and behind you, Michael Phelps-style. Peak power doesn't kick in until 6500rpm, and it hits hard. A clever bit of torque shaping (Aston is loath to call it cutting or throttling) in GT mode helps the power arrive cleanly and in a linear way through the first four gears; in the racier modes things get serious, fast. You need some bottle to spin it all the way to its 7000rpm limit on the road as the car hunkers down and your hands become busy.

Steering is exceptional. The electronically controlled Bosch diff comes in early but is subtle in its workings. The ZF 'box has a bespoke Aston set-up. Kickdown can be a bit hesitant, but Manual mode means manual, and it rifles through your paddle-shift commands cleanly. There's no knack to the carbon-ceramic brake discs either, just hugely impressive stopping force.

The Volante sounds better from outside than in, probably not helped by a touch of augmented soundscaping in the cabin. The boot is tiny, and while the interior is expensively crafted, it's largely the same as in the Vantage. But really that's nitpicking, because this is a wonderful car.

MURRAY SCULLION

Drop-top Vanquish has 75% more lateral stiffness than the DBS Volante



Button or key fob opens roof in 14sec and closes it in 16sec at up to 31mph

TECH SPEC

ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH VOLANTE

Brilliant, brash and beautiful without ever being too excessive. Everything we love about the coupé but with more drama

★★★★½

Price £360,000 (est)
Engine V12, 5203cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power 824bhp at 6500rpm
Torque 738lb ft at 2500-5000rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, RWD
Kerb weight 2005kg
0-62mph 3.4sec
Top speed 214mph
Economy 25mpg (est)
CO_2, tax band 312g/km, 37%
Rivals Lamborghini Revuelto, Ferrari 12Cilindri, McLaren Artura

TESTED 8.7.25, POWYS **DELIVERIES** NOW

SKODA ENYAQ vRS

Latest version of the electric family SUV gets go-faster vRS treatment

There isn't much 'victory Rally Sport' about a 2.2-tonne electric crossover, but Skoda has never been precious about its sporty vRS badge, and if anything this has been to its advantage. Those initials have been applied to subjects as diverse as diesel superminis and plug-in hybrid estates, but we've always known what they stand for: a sensible injection of performance and a measured stab of handling intent, plus a lightly racy interior trim and high equipment levels. Those ingredients work with almost any model in the range, and without inviting overbearing expectation from the fanbase. Witness how Volkswagen has so far not dared to bestow GTI status on its EVs or crossovers, lest a PR disaster unfold. But an Enyaq vRS? Sure, why not?

Skoda launched the Enyaq vRS – its most powerful and expensive model – in 2022 with 295bhp and 338lb ft and a Lamborghini-like, acid-green 'hero' colour. Three years later there's a new version, which has 335bhp and 402lb ft but costing £1500 or so less. This not only busts inflation but goes counter to the newer car's better equipment and bigger battery (claimed range is now 344 miles, up from 296 miles, while the rapid-charging speed has risen from 135kW to 185kW). Talk about swimming against the tide.

At £51,660, the vRS sits just above the Enyaq Sportline. Alongside a performance bump, it comes with highly adjustable DCC dampers as standard, along with electric massage seats for both front occupants and, of course, the sharp-but-subtle vRS styling. Rivals include quicker variants of the Ford Mustang Mach-E, Volkswagen ID 4 GTX, Kia EV6 and Tesla Model Y – some, but not all, of which the Skoda undercuts on price.

The cockpit architecture is unchanged from before. Those raked A-pillars and the never-ending upper dashboard still give the place an MPV-like atmosphere. Think Renault Espace and Toyota Previa – especially given the Toyota went without instruments directly in front of the driver long before Tesla made it fashionable with the Model 3. What isn't MPV-like about the Skoda is its driving position, which is surprisingly snug and low, with plenty of adjustability in the steering column. The same applies to the generously bolstered – and, frankly, fantastically comfortable – seats and the reams of Alcantara-like microsuede that adorn the cabin, extending to the door cards and the central armrest. This is a pleasant place to be for long drives, and of course that famously spacious Enyaq second row is unaffected by vRS specification.

The driving experience remains on the steady side. With so much weight to propel, that 402lb ft actually feels less punchy than it sounds, with the Enyaq ensuring the initial delivery of torque comes sensitively rather than making the driver feel like they've just flicked a switch. Even so, overtakes are fantastically easy. Flat out, the

The Enyaq's 2161kg kerb weight takes the edge off its outright pace

"Flat out, the Enyaq feels about as quick as a fully uncorked E39 M5"

TESTER'S NOTE

Skoda still makes the Enyaq in coupé form too, although the drop in boot capacity that comes with it does undermine the point of having a comparatively large car. **RL**

Cabin is spacious and well appointed; comfy front seats get massage function

Body movement is well contained and rolling refinement is good

Enyaq feels about as quick as a fully uncorked E39 BMW M5, although the EV's speed is almost immediate. In short it's quick enough, but the brakes need work. Certain car makers are starting to suss out how to solve the part-regenerative, part-physical braking-feel conundrum, but Skoda isn't yet one of them. The pedal is soft and imprecise, and while there are regen paddles behind the steering wheel, the car frustratingly reverts to a mode-dependent default setting.

Handling is a similar story. There's plenty of traction and stability, but despite the fact that the torque split is considerably rear-biased, there's not much in the way of natural poise, as you get with the Mustang Mach-E. The vRS is not fun, although it is well damped, meaning that what it lacks in enjoyment it makes up for in rolling refinement and a pervasive calmness. Equally, an Enyaq Sportline 85x optioned with the DCC dampers does even better in this respect. So the question is: are you going to enjoy the vRS's subtly more resolute steering action, its subtly better roll-resistance (courtesy of thicker anti-roll bars) and its subtly racier looks? You might well, in which case, it's a great car. If not, there are better Enyaqs for less.

RICHARD LANE

TECH SPEC

SKODA ENYAQ vRS

Perfectly competent and as quick as you'd ever need, but 'vRS' feels very much like a trim level here

★★★⯪☆

Price £51,660
Engine Asynchronous motor (f), permanent magnet synchronous motor (r)
Power 335bhp
Torque 402lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2161kg
0-62mph 5.4sec
Top speed 111mph
Battery 84/79kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 344 miles, 3.9mpkWh
CO$_2$, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Volkswagen ID 4 GTX, Tesla Model Y Long Range AWD

TESTED 8.7.25, POWYS **DELIVERIES** NOW

SKODA ELROQ vRS

Enyaq sibling turns up the wick too

SKODA BUNDLED THE UK launch of the Enyaq vRS together with that of its new little brother, the Elroq vRS. Mechanically the two cars really are nearly identical.

The Elroq gets the same 335bhp, four-wheel-drive powertrain and the same DCC dampers. Even the wheel and tyre package is the same. Aha, but the wheelbase is considerably shorter in the Elroq, for added agility, yes? Well, actually, no. The Enyaq has three millimetres of additional metal between its axles. We're therefore dealing with essentially the same cars, not least because the kerb weights are separated by just 7kg. The extra £5000 or so you'll pay for the hottest Enyaq is predominantly a premium levied for its additional boot space: the car's longer rear overhang gives it around 20% more capacity. That and the fact that only the Enyaq can be optioned with smart leather upholstery; the Elroq is limited to copious 'microsuede'.

Strange, then, that you wouldn't struggle to tell the two vRS models apart in a blindfolded test at the wheel (not recommended). It must come down to subtle differences in the suspension tune and that of the EPAS. The Elroq vRS may not have a shorter wheelbase, but it behaves as if it does, sweeping into corners more keenly and slicing through them and out the other side with a touch more togetherness. Where the Enyaq has a more loping gait, the Elroq is tauter. On first acquaintance it feels like a half-decent basis for a genuinely entertaining EV – something to rival Hyundai's Ioniq 5, perhaps.

Ultimately it doesn't build on this early promise, being happy to combine its reserves of traction and hearty-but-not-exciting performance with superb road manners and easy point-to-point pace. Instead, back the dampers off, sink into the superbly comfortable buckets and go easy on the accelerator to claw 280 miles or so from the battery, and the Elroq is a surprisingly effective electric GT. Just don't expect it to give you a cheeky quarter-turn of counter-steer, as the Cupra Born VZ will.

RICHARD LANE

TECH SPEC

SKODA ELROQ vRS

More expensive than direct rivals but also more powerful and practical. Seriously broad-batted but limited fun

★★★★☆

Price £46,560
Engine Asynchronous motor (f), permanent magnet synchronous motor (r)
Power 335bhp
Torque 402lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2154kg
0-62mph 5.4sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 84/77kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 336 miles, 3.8mpkWh
CO$_2$, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Cupra Born VZ, Mini Countryman SE All4

Hot Elroq is more agile and better tied-down than the larger Enyaq

Elroq vRS works best as a comfortable battery-powered GT

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5762**

MG S5 EV

Renault Scenic rival arrives using tech from MG's popular 4 hatchback

MODEL TESTED
MG S5 EV LONG RANGE TROPHY
Price £33,495
Power 228bhp
Torque 258lb ft
0-60mph 6.0sec
30-70mph 5.1sec
Top speed 103mph
70-0mph 45.7m (26deg C, dry)
Range 217/205/279 miles (average/touring/everyday)
Economy 3.5/3.3/4.5mpkWh (average/touring/everyday)
Weighted average charging rate 95kW

Just a few years ago, it took very little time to survey the span and purpose of the modest range of cars of 'budget brand' MG Motor. But suddenly that appraisal process now seems to take considerably longer.

Two years ago came the launch of the ambitious Cyberster convertible. Since then, we have seen the bread-and-butter core of MG's business shift and diversify slightly away from EVs and towards hybrids (MG 3, ZS and HS). Very recently, we have also witnessed the announcement of the firm's larger, pseudo-premium MG IM 5 and IM 6 models.

So the company that broke through with value EVs is now doing sports cars, executive cars and no-nonsense hybrids as well. Perhaps, then, it's about time it came back to earth and gave us another value EV. Which is what the subject of this road test – the MG S5 EV – would seem to be.

Although an indirect successor to the old ZS Electric, this is very much a ground-up electric-only model and it shares its rear-driven chassis with the popular MG 4 hatchback. It therefore takes proven mechanicals and stretches a larger, taller body over the top of them, which allows MG access to a key battleground: the all-electric C-segment SUV class, where the Renault Scenic E-Tech, Kia EV3, Volvo EX30 and Skoda Elroq all lie in wait.

The S5 goes up against those cars with MG's customary value advantage. But, as we will learn, in plenty of ways it doesn't look, feel or behave like a car that needs any such advantage, or any excuses made for it. Read on to find out exactly why.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS Neat, contemporary looks; bang-on C-SUV-typical dimensions; fairly light, with plenty of power

CONS No extended-range 300-mile-plus version

There's no mistaking which market segment the S5 EV is aimed at. It's just under 4.5m long at the kerb, making it an almost exact match for most of the rivals we have just mentioned.

Although it's technically related to the MG 4, its appearance is quite different. The smaller MG 4 hatchback has that unmistakable look of a generic plastic car mat toy, but there's more visual sophistication about the S5. The bumper design references the Cyberster's laterally split front air dam and there's just enough curve and sculpture about the profile to banish any sense of boxiness. The end result is less distinctive than the MG 4, sure, but also more mature and less stylistically naive.

S5 is an indirect replacement for ZS EV

The platform that the car uses – MG's all-steel Modular Scalable Platform – confers a rear-mounted permanent magnet synchronous motor on this car. It develops 168bhp and 184lb ft if you go for the Standard Range model and 228bhp and 258lb ft in the case of the Long Range, giving the latter more grunt than the equivalent MG 4.

Battery capacity is likewise broadly comparable to the MG 4. The cheaper model uses a lithium-iron-phosphate battery pack of 47.1kWh of usable capacity, the pricier variant a nickel-manganese-cobalt one of 62.1kWh, both being sandwiched under the cabin floor.

The main difference here is that, unlike in the MG 4, there's no S5 Extended Range version – and, MG sources suggest, neither will there be. Take-up on the MG 4 Extended Range, they say, is less than 5% of total volume and the improvement to real-world range that an S5 Extended Range model would have delivered compared with an S5 Long Range would have been more marginal than on the MG 4.

The one key on-paper disadvantage that the S5 will carry compared with its competitors, then, looks set to be the absence of any derivative capable of more than 300 lab-test miles of range. Elsewhere, there are few demerits. New wheel bearings are claimed to cut rolling resistance compared with the MG 4, while a new integrated brake booster system from Continental is said to not only cut stopping distances but also make energy regeneration more efficient.

Our upper-trim Long Range Trophy test car weighed 1723kg on the scales. That's notably less than long-range versions of the Kia EV3 and Renault Scenic E-Tech, and quite a lot less than the equivalent Skoda Elroq.

Given the relative size of the MG's drive battery, that kind of advantage would make sense. But what other advantages might it enable?

INTERIOR

★★★★⯪

PROS Spacious and comfortable; hits a new high standard for perceived quality

CONS Some of the richer touches only come on top-level Trophy derivatives

Chinese car makers have already proven themselves responsive to market trends and fast to improve. Their progress has depended on it.

Even allowing for that, however, the interior of the S5 EV is likely to surprise people – and not only with its space but also its apparent material sophistication. It's a real change of gear.

Centrally divided lower air intake, below the 'sealed'-style nose, is inspired by the Cyberster convertible. It's not quite as stark a look as a Tesla's front end but it still catches the eye.

Wheels all have aero-style spoke designs. You get 17s on SE models, and these 18s on a Trophy. The braking system behind them has been developed by Continental.

While the 4, ZS and HS all impressed us relative to our expectations, the S5 could just as well be from an established European maker. Consider, for instance, the pudgy plushness of its dashboard pad; the inviting, metallised material quality of many of its secondary controls; and the skill with which it mixes in materials such as Alcantara and faux carbonfibre to lift the overall ambience above the purely functional.

Not every model benefits from all of these materials, granted. Our test subject is a Trophy derivative and only here does the car get electric front seat adjustment and adjustable lumbar support, as well as heated front seats and a heated steering wheel.

But, as we will come to, even in Trophy trim, this isn't an EV that's priced at all ambitiously. Moreover, nowhere do its mouldings feel cheap or flimsy, so the expensive highlights don't seem like a diversionary tactic.

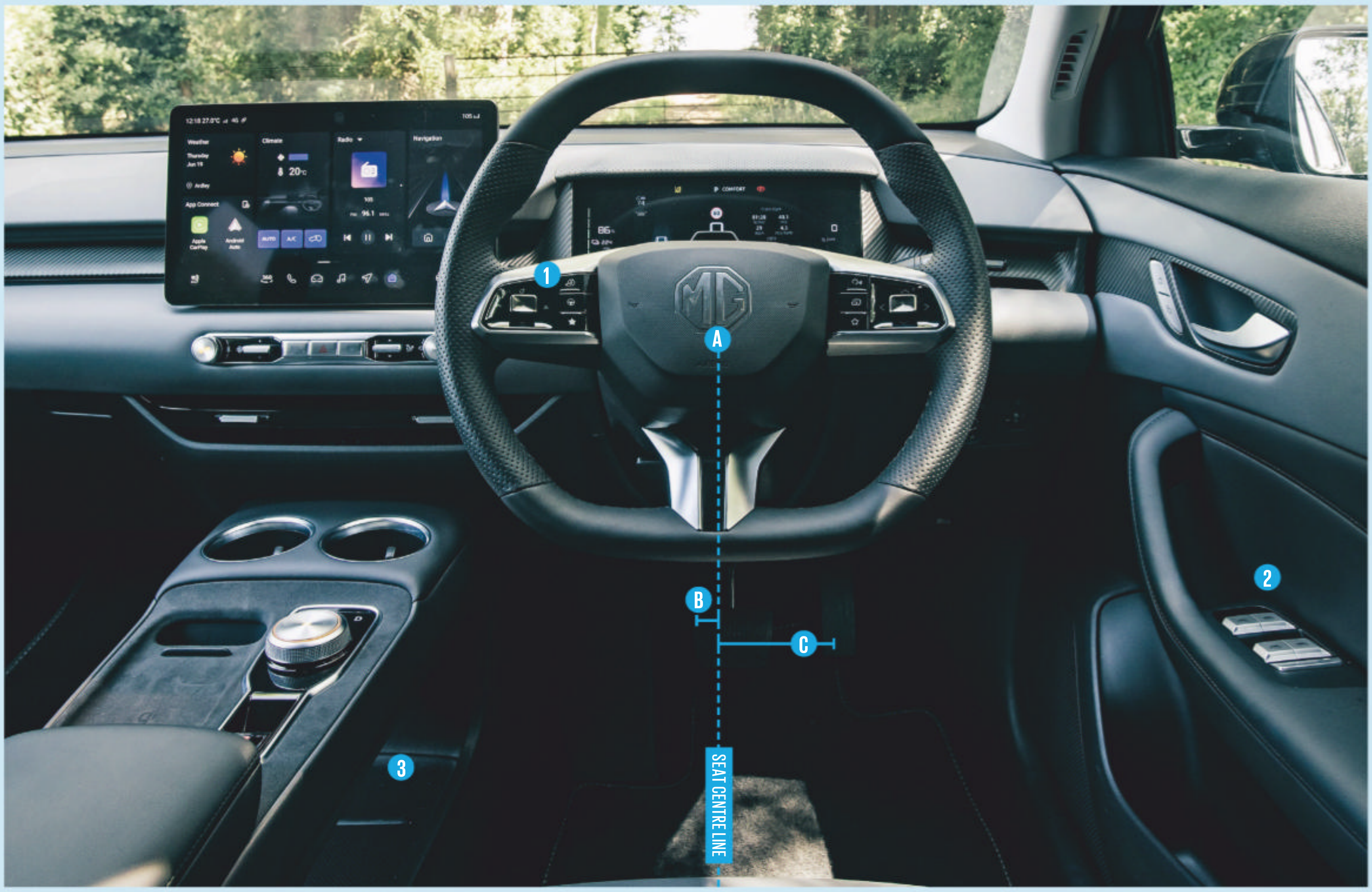
Against the tape measure, there is more encouraging news. The S5 offers more second-row head and leg room than either a Renault Scenic E-Tech or a Kia EV3, but a little less than a Skoda Elroq. ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Buttons on these spokes control the trip computer, adaptive cruise, speed limiter and audio system. They are proper buttons too, not annoying touch-sensitive capacitive controls.

② Satin chrome window switches are a good, chunky size and the pleasing haptic feel to their action suggests that MG is taking an interest in perceived quality.

③ Centre console offers storage for bags and hats underneath and smaller items in the armrest cubby and cupholders. The lower level could do with some retention features.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 10mm left Ⓒ Accelerator offset 130mm right. Left-of-centre brake pedal positioning is a little unusual and lends itself to using your left foot. The steering column adjusts widely.

There's plenty of adult-appropriate space in both rows; the back seats are well provided with amenities such as cupholders and power outlets (although, again, better in a Trophy model than an SE); and the boot has a proper height-adjustable floor, with a competitive below-the-parcel-shelf capacity of 453 litres (Kia EV3 460 litres, Skoda Elroq 470 litres) and equally competitive verified loading length and width.

MULTIMEDIA

★★★⯪☆

PROS Full wireless smartphone mirroring compatibility; fairly simple usability; physical home button and heater controls
CONS A little bit laggy and unresponsive; could use better shortcut toolbars

MG claims that the S5's 12.8in infotainment system represents a generational improvement compared with the one in the MG 4. In some ways, it doesn't feel quite like that. The screen is slow to respond at times, and although it includes wireless smartphone mirroring as standard, it often needed extra prompts to reconnect to Apple CarPlay during our test.

But usability is notably improved by the simple provision of more physical controls: a 'home' menu button underneath the screen itself, which doubles as a volume knob for the audio system, and some tactile metallised rocker switches to control the heating and ventilation. These, provided as a result of customer feedback concerning touchscreen-dominated usability, take the onus off using the display for every little thing and, more often than not, keep you from needing multi-stage touchscreen interactions to find the particular function you need.

However, the home screen could still provide better direct access to frequently used functions, and more useful quick-access toolbars at the margins of the display.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆

PROS Decently quick; linear accelerator and brake calibration
CONS Adaptive regen control is slow-witted and manual control could be better

The S5 isn't the most powerful car in its class, but nor does it need to be. It's relatively light and on a dry test day, with a rear-mounted motor and rearward weight distribution, it made more than enough traction for an assured, brisk getaway.

It needed just 6.0sec flat to hit 60mph from rest, 5.1sec to get from 30-70mph and the same 5.1sec to go from 50-80mph. Among those rivals we have already mentioned, only a Skoda Elroq 85 is quicker across any of those benchmark sprints – and where it is, only very marginally so.

The S5 offers five driving modes but needs to be in Sport to give you access to all of its available power. Yet even here, the accelerator pedal mapping is linear and predictable and isn't tuned to pile on instantaneous torque for effect.

The brake pedal is likewise progressively tuned and blends regen with friction braking very well. But you do depend on it to do that, because MG's management of energy regeneration still isn't as clever as it might be.

There's a one-pedal driving mode that works well enough, if it's your cup of tea, and there are three 'manual' regen settings (1, 2, 3) through which regen is incrementally ramped up. You can cycle through these using a user-customisable star button on the steering wheel, but only in one direction, and proper paddle-shift control would be much better.

MG's 'adaptive' regen mode, meanwhile, is slow to react to preceding cars as they move across in traffic and to dial up regen for junctions you're approaching. There's also no 'regen off' coasting mode.

So outright performance is good but drivability could still be a little bit better.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★★☆

PROS Juggles comfort, isolation, grip and body control with some accomplishment
CONS Less settled on quicker country roads than around town or on the motorway

The rear-driven chassis of the MG 4 seems a promising starting point for the S5 to build on, although it's a heavier car with a longer wheelbase and a higher roofline, of course, which makes it unlikely to feel like a perfect dynamic match for its smaller sibling.

But it's a promising start that this car puts to good use. Just as with its interior, there are palpable undertones of sophistication and maturity about the way the S5 rides and handles, suggestive of a more practised, expert hand in tuning than you might expect from MG.

Even on 18in rims, it rides with some suppleness and well-isolated, low noise levels. It has steady and settled body control on most roads, and consistent and well-balanced grip levels most of the time, making it easy and reassuring to drive and free of any nasty vices or habits.

It feels slightly softer-riding than the MG 4, less naturally agile and athletic, and more moderate in its character. But in that respect, it is capable of doing lots of things quite well, rather than compromising in any particular area.

The car's Bridgestone Turanza tyres provide a fairly strong grip level on dry asphalt (although they did show slightly compromised lateral adhesion and stopping distances on Horiba MIRA's wet surfaces). So the S5 typically doesn't lean on its traction and stability controls for support when driven quickly and it maintains reasonable body control when you're doing so – and it doesn't feel like an EV tuned for maximum range and efficiency, and compromised in doing so. There is, by and large, a sense of roundedness and dynamic versatility to it that plenty of Chinese rivals would struggle to match.

You can begin to find the margins of that sense of composure at quicker country road speeds, when bumpier surfaces just begin to make the car's body pitch fore and aft persistently and sharper edges can start to thump through the S5's ride isolation. You may also notice the car's rearwards weight distribution when crosswinds present, which can divert it a little.

But neither of these is a factor at the kind of speeds and on the sort of surfaces where the S5 will spend most of its time – and where it would overwhelmingly be unremarkable but competent, pleasant company.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★★⯪☆

PROS New MG Pilot Custom mode makes it easy to turn off the annoying systems

CONS Adaptive cruise control is over-sensitive in traffic; driver monitoring is strict about yawning

Every S5, even at its £28,495 entry price, has a full suite of ADAS technology that includes adaptive cruise control, lane keeping and traffic jam assist, driver monitoring and blindspot monitoring.

The car's autonomous emergency braking system features pedestrian and cyclist detection and runs unobtrusively in the background without needless interventions.

The lane keeping and departure warning systems are likewise fairly unbothersome, although the driver monitoring system is particularly sensitive if you yawn at the wheel, insisting you take a break.

The car's adaptive cruise control is less good. It's slow to resume a set speed as the lane ahead clears and is given to over-compensating for traffic in adjacent lanes.

But MG's big breakthrough is the S5's MG Pilot Custom function, which works like similar settings offered by Land Rover and Renault. So you can disable the frustrating systems once, save your preferences, and reactivate them with one 'button' on the MG Pilot touchscreen menu every time you 'start' the car.

It would be better still if this was done through an actual physical button. But this feels like important progress all the same and prevents the S5's more irksome ADAS features from routinely annoying.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Value advantage is clear; decent efficiency

CONS Outright range and DC charging speed are only okay

S5 EV prices start at £28,495 and rise to £33,495 for our range-topping test car, so while it's clearly a C-segment SUV, it's priced more like a B-segment one (Ford Puma Gen-E, Mini Aceman, Renault 4). Comparing entry-level prices, the cheapest Skoda Elroq is £3000 pricier and the cheapest Kia EV3 £4500 more expensive. The S5 also comes with an 80,000-mile/seven-year warranty.

Where monthly finance is concerned, it's in a predictably strong position too. Allowing for a typical term and deposit (36 months, £5000), the entry-level MG will cost between £45 and £85 less per month than its key rivals (Elroq SE and EV3 Air).

As for running efficiency, the S5 delivered better touring test results than the Scenic and EV3, but slightly worse than the Elroq. So as far as real-world range is concerned and with only that medium-sized battery to draw on, the car is left in a respectable, although not particularly strong, position. Our Long Range test car suggested that it could put 205 miles between charges on longer motorway trips (Renault Scenic E-Tech Long Range 261 miles, Kia EV3 81.4kWh 203 miles and Skoda Elroq 85 270 miles). Shorter-hop efficiency is much better, as it tends to be on all EVs, and DC rapid-charging performance for the MG is likewise respectable, if a little slow.

But all things considered, this probably isn't the EV to choose for higher-mileage users. If there is anywhere that it offers less than the going rate for an electric C-segment SUV, it's on longer-range usability. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1060mm, head room 1030mm. Plenty of space for taller drivers here and reasonable seat comfort and support.

REAR Leg room 770mm, head room 960mm. S5 beats both a Kia EV3 and a Renault Scenic for second-row space. Trophy trim adds central armrest.

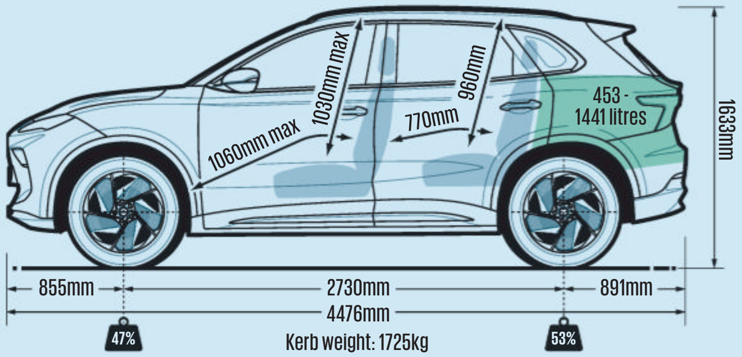
BOOT Length 860-1650mm, width 960-1260mm, height 410-570-840mm. Adjustable floor makes loading easier; charging cable can fit below it.

"Dynamically, it's capable of doing lots of things quite well"

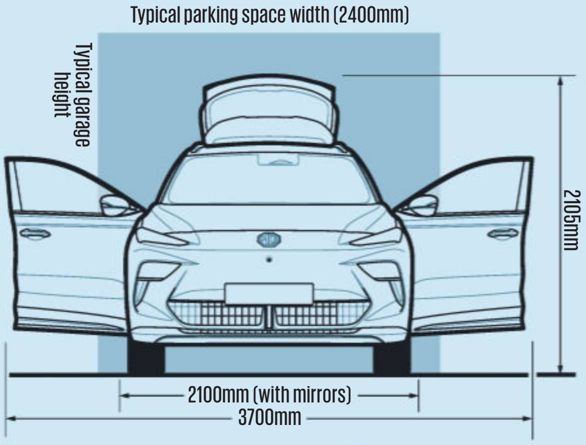
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4476mm **Width** 2100mm/1849mm (with/without mirrors)
Height 1633mm **Door span** 3700mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2105mm

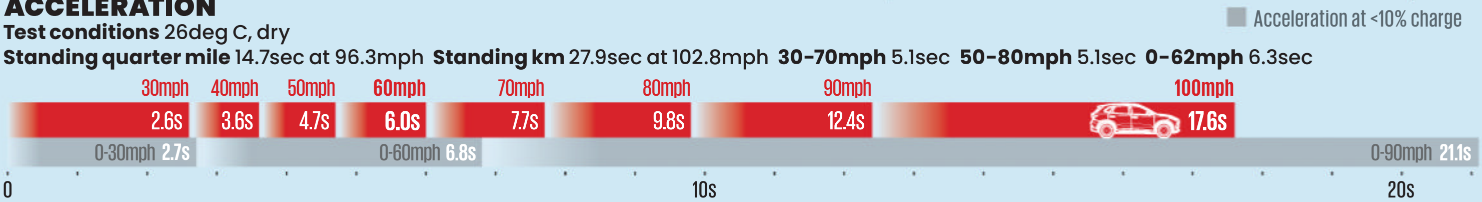

1060mm max
1030mm max
770mm
960mm
453 - 1441 litres
1633mm
855mm
2730mm
891mm
4476mm
47%
53%
Kerb weight: 1725kg

PARKING

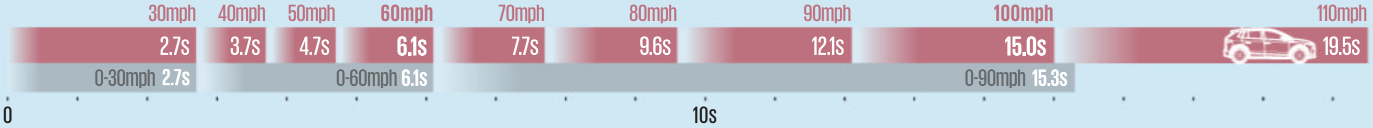

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2105mm
2100mm (with mirrors)
3700mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 26deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 14.7sec at 96.3mph **Standing km** 27.9sec at 102.8mph **30-70mph** 5.1sec **50-80mph** 5.1sec **0-62mph** 6.3sec

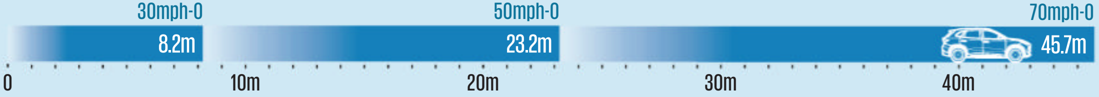


Skoda Elroq Edition 85 (2025, 14deg C, dry)
Standing quarter mile 14.7sec at 98.8mph **Standing km** 27.0sec at 113.0mph **30-70mph** 5.0sec **50-80mph** 4.9sec

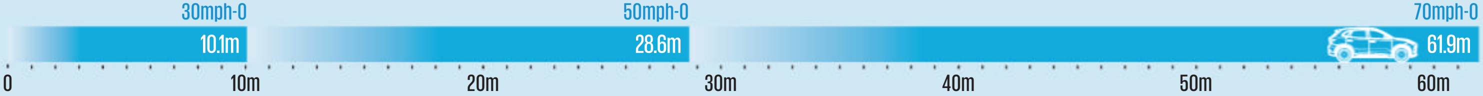


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.52sec

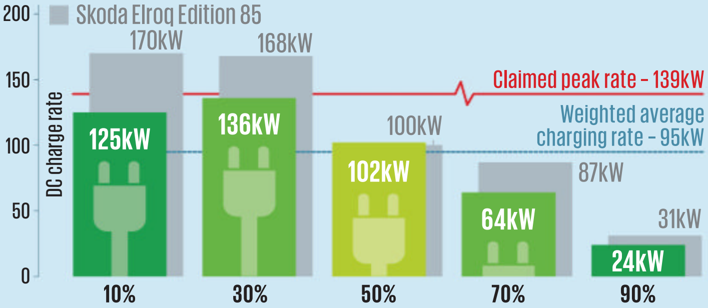


Wet 60-0mph 3.07sec



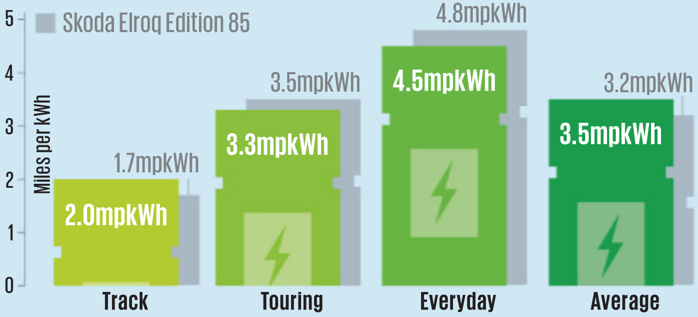
RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

Charging port location Nearside rear wing
Charger used 350kW, ABB HP CP500C, Gridserve **AC charging** 7kW

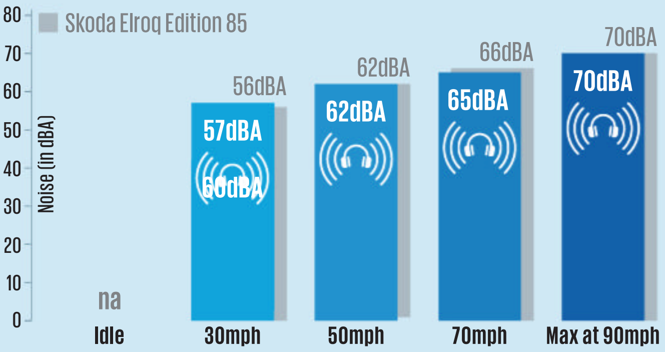


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 288 miles, 3.8mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 217/205/279 miles (average/touring/everyday)

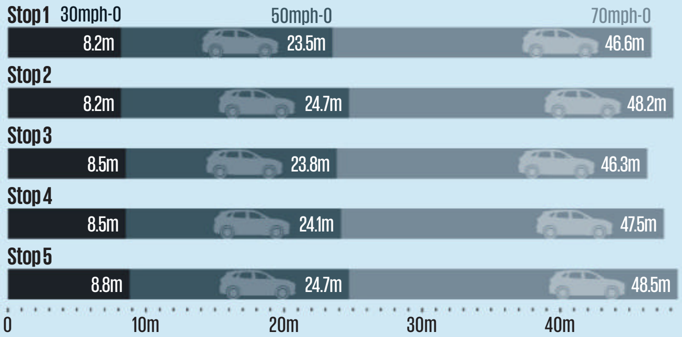


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 1.9m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

MG S5 EV LONG RANGE TROPHY

On-the-road price £33,495
Price as tested £34,040
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £15,175
Contract hire £297 pcm (£1780 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £327 pcm (£6700 deposit + 36 months/24,000 miles)
Insurance group 34

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard MG Pilot (adaptive cruise control, lane keep assist, high beam assist), front, side, curtain and central airbags, part-leather-effect upholstery, electric driver's seat, six-speaker audio, heated front seats, heated steering wheel **Optional** Metallic paint, Piccadilly Blue £545

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Rear, transverse, RWD
Type Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 228bhp
Torque 258lb ft
Maximum regen capacity 25kW
Battery type NMC
Capacity 64.0/62.1kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 380V
Power to weight 132bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 150lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
Reduction ratio 10.6:1
mph per 1000rpm 7.8
rpm at 70/80mph 8992/10,277

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1725kg/1723kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 47%/53%
Drag coefficient 0.27
Wheels 7.0Jx18in
Tyres 225/55 R18 102V, Bridgestone Turanza T005
Spare None (mobility foam)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.5 turns lock to lock; 10.5m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 321mm ventilated discs, four-piston calipers **Rear** 300mm solid discs, single-piston calipers
Handbrake type Electronic, switch (right of centre console)

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2025)
Adult occupant 90%, child occupant 82%, vulnerable road users 82%, safety assist 78%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO₂ 0g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £17/£33

VERDICT

Outstrips expectations for the money, except on range

★★★★☆

The MG S5 EV is a car we should have expected from a firm that's been rocketing on an upward trajectory, yet the accomplished drive and practical, sophisticated interior still make you marvel at how much this brand can now offer, for remarkably little outlay.

The S5 is several steps beyond cheap and cheerful as a budget proposition. In some respects, it's fully competitive with the best EVs in the C-SUV niche.

It's likely to come up short on real-world range for longer-distance drivers, and with its finer-detail drivability and ADAS tuning, the mask slips a little, as the S5 betrays the progress MG still has to make.

But what progress it has made already. The S5 EV really is a coming of age. The price gets your attention and yet the product commands respect.

TESTERS' NOTES

MATT SAUNDERS
The S5's adaptive speed limiter is an ADAS function I actually quite like. It simply prevents you from exceeding the posted limit (unless you absolutely flatten the accelerator) and it works quite well.

ILLYA VERPRAET
The way some brands continue to omit proper manual regen control on their EVs is baffling, but MG is nearly there. All it needs is an additional 'off/coast' setting – and if MG doesn't like paddles, a rocker button controller on the steering wheel would do.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Be a bit bolder with the exterior design.
- Add an extended-range model that can exceed 300 miles.
- Give us a proper physical button for the MG Pilot Custom ADAS mode.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	6
			MG S5 EV LONG RANGE TROPHY			
	SKODA ELROQ EDITION 85	**RENAULT SCENIC E-TECH LONG RANGE TECHNO**		**KIA EV3 81.4KWH GT LINE**	**HYUNDAI KONA ELECTRIC N LINE**	**SMART #1 PRO+**
	Unbeatable mix of range, space, quality, comfort and ease of use. MG makes it look pricey, but worth it.	Spacious, efficient and inviting, with great finance deals. Realistic 300-miler.		Another compact EV with genuine 300-mile usability. More expensive than some in the trim you'd want.	Recent cut has kept it broadly price-competitive. A bit quirky-looking, but creditable enough.	Small but packs in plenty of cabin space. Latest PCP deals bring it under £400 a month. Irksome tech.
	★★★★⯪	★★★★☆		★★★★☆	★★★⯪☆	★★★☆☆
Price	£38,595	£37,195		£39,405	£37,000	£36,895
Power, torque	282bhp, 402lb ft	215bhp, 221lb ft		201bhp, 209lb ft	215bhp, 188lb ft	268bhp, 253lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	6.6sec, 111mph	7.9sec, 105mph		7.9sec, 105mph	7.8sec, 107mph	6.7sec, 112mph
Range, economy	355 miles, 4.1mpkWh	367 miles, 4.1mpkWh		367 miles, 4.1mpkWh	282 miles, 3.7mpkWh	261 miles, 3.7mpkWh

Autocar
THE LIGHT FANTASTIC
NEW PORSCHE 928S4 TESTED
AUTOCAR
AUDI'S TESLA
ROAD TEST YEARBOOK
The Autocar
Entirely New Anglia
DURON
CAR & GENERAL
Christmas Gifts
SHOCK: NEW KIA BEATS
AUTOCAR
THEY'VE FIXED IT
NEW GTI REV
Pumped-up hot hatch tops reb
Why this is the new Fiesta
secret Porsche rival
Big Jimny: the cheap 4x4 you really want
The crazy supercar that's 3D-printed
MORRIS
THE CAR WITH THE LOWEST UPKEEP COSTS
ANCIENT & MODERN
Tested: 1896 Lutzmann
1978 Renault

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RICHARD LANE

Testing, testing

PIRELLI
WINNER GARAGE
SKODA

Rally or racing car ride-alongs are a life-affirming perk of the job

For obvious reasons, the concept of a 'passenger ride' doesn't light the fires of sweaty-palmed anticipation in most road testers. Car maker A will put you on a pre-dawn flight to Helsinki, whence you'll board an internal connection up to Rovaniemi, followed by an hour or two's transit and plenty of hanging around, only to sit on the less interesting side of some compact crossover prototype, staring at an entirely disguised dash while being driven around a frozen lake for 15 minutes. Then home you trot, too little the wiser.

For Car maker A, this is a fabulously effective method of stringing out the coverage. It gets the new product's existence out there long before the project leaders are confident enough to let an outsider with a critical arse have a proper go. We normally play along because, ultimately, on these trips there is still news to be broken: there are insights to be made and engineers to be quizzed. But we'd rather be driving, seeing as we've often travelled far, as has the damned car.

Alas, so fruitful and risk-free is the passenger-ride approach from a PR standpoint that it is not unknown for car makers to tempt us out to drive a prototype, only for that drive to quietly morph into a ride after the travel has been arranged. One German OEM particularly loves this stunt.

But there's another side to the passenger ride, and it's among the very sweetest parts of this job, depending on the equation of vehicle, driver and environment. It's also something I'm sure we're going to see more of, as European marques frantically seek to underscore their heritage as a differentiating factor against Chinese brands.

> **"They're such a joyful expression of what it is to go fast in a car"**

Occasionally, for a tangential activity on a launch event, a car maker will wheel out one of its racing cars for us to have a ride in. Or it might get a superstar driver to take us for a hot lap or three in the road car being launched. Hitting the jackpot would be getting an extraordinary car and the superstar driver together on a world-class circuit. The launch of the latest 911 GT3 RS comes to mind: Jörg Bergmeister at Silverstone, smashing the car's brake pedal at about the point even experienced journalists were rolling off it. After the disclaimers have been signed, and the HANS is hooked up to your lid, and the car's door clicks shut, the next few dizzying minutes as a passenger can generate lifelong memories.

I bring this up now because last week Skoda launched the new Enyaq and Elroq vRS models. They're comfy and capable but prosaic EVs, as you perhaps read on p34. A nice home-counties venue for the launch event seemed likely, but instead the invite said we have to get ourselves out to Sweet Lamb. Ah, yes, that famous den of rally-based antics in mid-Wales. The link between the new EVs and the R5 Fabia that Skoda laid on to give rides was utterly tenuous, but who cared? They were both Skodas, which was excuse enough to plaster a smile on everybody's faces on a sunny Tuesday morn. Bob Morgan bounced us around Ceredigion's valleys, which reverberated to the rasp of a straight-piped 1.6 (assembled in Shanghai, as it happens). It was a cool thing for Skoda's comms people to tee up, but perhaps also a rather savvy PR move. The release of feelgood endorphins must have lasted long into the day.

For me, rally cars are perhaps at the top of the ride hierarchy (and handily they always have a passenger seat). They move with an almost incomprehensible three-dimensionality if you're accustomed to circuit metal. Extreme levels of pitch and roll combine with mid-scrambling braking performance on loose surfaces, while yaw and power are used to rotate the car in a way that would get you killed or at least black-flagged anywhere else. They're just such a joyful, thrilling expression of what it is to go fast in a car. And they're surprisingly comfortable, because pliancy is paramount. I can remember charging around the Montserrat mountains with Dakar-winning Nasser Al-Attiyah on especially impish form at the wheel of his T1+ Hilux, gobsmacked at how this battle-truck rode like a Phantom.

So what's the ultimate combination of car, driver and environment? The answer will be different for everyone, and that's part of the beauty of it. For the purposes of pub banter you might take an interdisciplinary, time-travelling approach. Max Verstappen in a Jag XJR-9 on his beloved Nordschleife. Cor. Sébastien Loeb in Bill Elliott's Nascar Ford Thunderbird at Mount Panorama. Keeping it real, a go in any current Rally1 car, driven close to flat out, would take the biscuit for me, ideally at Ouninpohja. Driver? Wouldn't mind; they're all the best type of mad.

ATTENTION PLEASE

The new Vantage Roadster is waving the flag for a resurgent Aston Martin, but can it win favour over its open-top rivals from McLaren and Ferrari? **JAMES DISDALE** slaps on the sunscreen

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

Y27 MCL
V8 FNE

BD25 PFY

The mercury is climbing steadily into the high twenties, and above us the blue sky is dotted with only a smattering of little fluffy clouds. At last, summer is here. Better still, we've got the scenery and roads to match: the B4518 scythes up, through and around rolling Welsh hills before depositing us at a viewpoint overlooking the stunning Clywedog reservoir, its gently wind-whipped waters glinting and sparkling in the sun a few hundred metres below us.

Behind us, their exhausts and engines pinging away like a distant steel band as metal components cool and contract, are three of the fastest hair dryers £200,000 (and a bit more) can buy. Effortlessly combining game-on driving dynamics, drop-top glamour and power outputs north of 600bhp, this open-air trio could just be – right here and now, on these roads and in this weather – the best cars in the world.

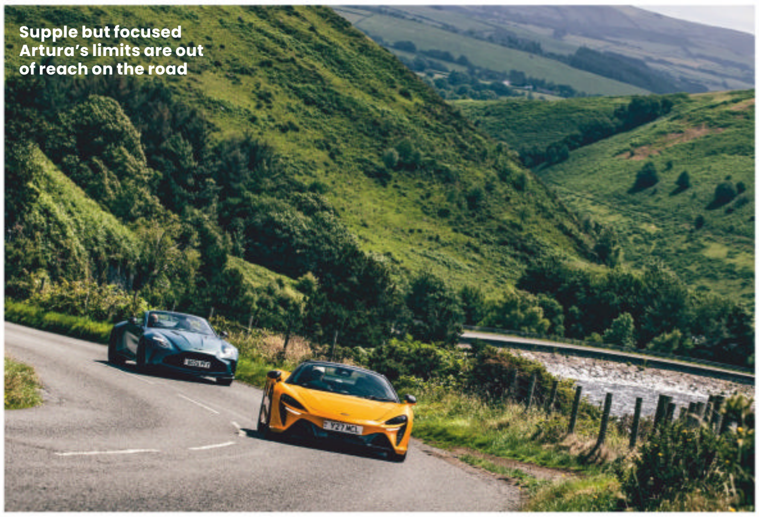
However, this is an Autocar group test, so there has to be a winner. But which one? Well, we'll get to that, but first let's take a look at the contenders, starting with the car that inspired this gathering of upper-class alfresco entertainers: the new Aston Martin Vantage Roadster, the latest offering from the resurgent and newly confident British brand.

As the name suggests, it's essentially a convertible version of the recently launched coupé. In fact, it's so closely related that, addition of a fabric roof and 60kg of strengthening aside, the handsomely thuggish Roadster shares pretty much the same set-up as its tin-top sibling. The rear damper's operating software has been tickled, but in all other mechanical respects Aston's cloth-topped contender is identical.

That means it gets the same 656bhp 'hot-vee' twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8 that's been donated by Mercedes-AMG, driving the rear wheels through an eight-speed automatic ZF transaxle. Also carried over are the looks, which are given an extra edge by our car's matt blue paintwork. The fabric roof itself is neatly integrated and, at just 6.8sec to raise or lower, is the quickest here, allowing you to worship the sun or avoid the rain at the drop of a hat.

Acting as an elegant counterpoint to the brutish Aston is the Ferrari Roma Spider. Its classically proportioned GT lines mean the curvaceous Italian is less attention-grabbing than its British rivals, but it's far from unattractive. Launched in 2023, it is based on the coupé version that had its debut in 2018 and which is already in line for retirement – Maranello has announced it will be replaced

"For jaw-dropping kerb appeal, the Ferrari and Aston give best to the bright orange McLaren"



Supple but focused Artura's limits are out of reach on the road

Minimalist Alcantara-trimmed McLaren is comfortable in town and at a cruise

by the all-new Amalfi next year – although this rag-top version of the Roma is destined to soldier on for a while yet.

Like the Aston, the Roma features a forced-induction V8 and an eight-speed gearbox (a dual-clutch auto here, rather than a torque converter) that combine to drive the rear wheels. It also has a powered cloth covering (with five-layer insulation, no less), but at 13.5sec to stow or open, it's the most sluggish here.

For jaw-dropping kerb appeal, both the Ferrari and Aston have to give best to the bright orange McLaren, which has a magnetic attraction to smartphone-wielding supercar spotters. Acting as the outlier in this contest, the carbonfibre-tubbed Woking wonder goes about its business of delivering fast fresh-air thrills in a very different way. Not only is its engine mid-mounted, the 3.0-litre turbocharged V6 has the smallest capacity and the fewest cylinders. Moreover, the Artura is also a hybrid, and a plug-in one at that. That means both 21 miles of electric running and a combined power output of 690bhp, making the Spider the spiciest of our swift sun-seekers.

Speaking of which, McLaren favours a folding hard-top (actually it's more of a targa panel) for the Artura, which means its convertible conversion adds the fewest extra kilos – the roof and associated mechanism weigh 62kg for an overall kerb weight of 1560kg. Next up is the Ferrari, which at 1556kg (Maranello only quotes a 'dry' figure, so let's say somewhere around 1600-and-a-bit with fluids) weighs 84kg more than its coupé cousin. Heaviest Hector is the Aston, which is a scale-creaking 1805kg all in.

Perhaps the Aston's extra avoirdupois is down to its lavishly trimmed cabin, which is slathered in soft leather and rich-feeling materials. As a result, it matches the more expensive Roma for club-class appeal, each giving you the feeling that you've climbed into an expensively tailored suit – although only the Fezza offers four-up practicality. The McLaren, on the other hand, feels a little minimalist by comparison, although it's nicely finished, with plenty of Alcantara and carbonfibre accents. Okay, that's the showroom tyre-kicking done; it's time to get moving.

On the drive westwards to our mid-Wales destination, it's the long-legged Ferrari that draws first blood: its mix of plush damping and remarkable roof-up refinement make it the most relaxed cruiser – the only intrusion is the distant backbeat of the V8. The Aston can't compete. Its adaptive dampers remain fairly uncompromising in all modes, leading to a fidgety firmness that means the Vantage struggles to settle. Surprisingly, the McLaren comes closest to matching the Roma's cushioned ride. Its low-speed stiffness (even in the dampers' softest setting) gives way to a supple yet tautly ▶

The Roma's manettino drive mode controller still sets the standard for ease of use on the fly and a pleasingly limited choice of settings.

Vantage's cabin is richly well finished, but its fidgety ride can intrude

Ferrari feels very special, and there's room in it for four – just about

◂ controlled gait. The downside is that the carbonfibre tub transmits a fair bit of road noise.

Top down, there's little between the three when it comes to keeping your hairdo unharmed: each one opens you up to the elements with surprisingly little buffeting from fast flowing air. Each has a wind deflector that can be deployed to help keep the cabin calm, although the Ferrari's set-up is rather Heath Robinson in its operation – it can be automatically activated at the touch of a button but requires you to twist around in your seat and manually push it back into place when no longer needed. Best is the McLaren's powered glass window, which can be lowered with the roof in place to allow some open-air vibes even in inclement weather.

To get the best out of this trio, however, you'll want to travel topless most of the time – and today's fine weather demands it. Not only does it add the extra stimulation of the sights and smells of the great outdoors, but it also gets you closer to the aural action – and no car here puts on a greater sonic show than the bombastic Vantage.

This isn't one of the all-time great vocalists (think Lemmy from Motörhead rather than Annie Lennox), but the way it barks, pops and cracks never fails to elicit a giggle – although extended and use in shouty Sport+ mode could land you with an asbo. It has substance to match the sounds, too, and despite the need to move a lot of mass, the Aston's 656bhp V8 accelerates with a muscular, deep-chested urgency.

The sense of instant energy is enhanced by the carefully chosen and closely stacked ratios of the Roadster's eight-speed automatic gearbox. It can't quite match the whip-crack ratio changes of the dual-clutch units used in the Roma and Artura, but it offers greater smoothness and civility in low-speed manoeuvres.

That said, neither the Aston nor the Ferrari can match the McLaren's all-electric party trick, which makes early morning getaways less wearisome for your neighbours. The novelty of being able to slip silently through city traffic never really wears off in the Artura, and it's a USP that will endear it to many who will use these cars for more than high days and holidays. Better still, when the V6 does fire into life, it reveals itself as one of the firm's sweeter-sounding units.

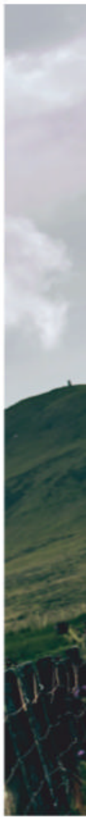
The older V8s have a certain industrial quality to their delivery, but the Artura Spider's engine takes on an ear-pleasingly harmonious howl as it spins quickly and eagerly towards 8000rpm. And, boy, is it fast. By using its 94bhp electric motor to add low-speed torque, the McLaren avoids the laggy wait-and-whoosh that characterises the firm's other wares, meaning there's instant get-up-and-go in any gear and at any revs: the Artura is a proper card-carrying supercar.

With 612bhp the Roma looks a little weak-kneed in this company, and there's no denying that in an all-out, hell-for-leather sprint the Fezza would come home in third spot. Yet all things are relative, and anyone feeling short-changed

Vantage's fabric hood can be stowed or raised in just 6.8sec

Artura has a folding hard-top and is only 62kg heavier than the coupé version

Roma's hood deploys in 13.5sec; wind deflector operation is a bit of a faff



"The way the Aston barks, pops and crackles never fails to elicit a giggle"

Ferrari balances sporting prowess with GT ability and copes well on bumpy roads

by the Spider's accelerative abilities needs their adrenal gland checked for signs of drought.

It's not the most musical of Maranello's motors – it sounds more like a couple of fruity four-pots stitched together – but the firm's mastery of turbocharging means it has an almost naturally aspirated response and appetite for revs that encourages you to work for your rewards.

Of our topless triumvirate, it's the Roma that should be the least focused and fun in the corners, owing to Ferrari's assertion that the Spider is more of a GT than the fine-handling coupé version. Its bodyshell's static rigidity has been reduced by 30% as a result of roof removal, and the adaptive dampers have been slackened across the board to compensate. And yet…

If anything, the Roma's more forgiving suspension, especially in Bumpy Road mode, makes it feel right at home on the UK's raggedy highways, and that offsets some of the admittedly very minimal scuttle shake. It's almost as if Ferrari's chassis engineers have spent as much time on this route out of Llanidloes as they have lapping Fiorano.

It sounds like damning with faint praise, but there's something of a supersized Mazda MX-5 about the way the Spider slices through corners: the Ferrari's soft yet beautifully controlled chassis allows you to more clearly feel the car approaching its limits and so more confidently exploit its natural balance. The steering is quick and light but not flighty, which allows you to ▸

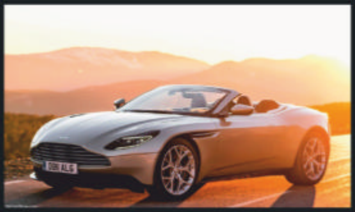
No estate car practicality here, but each has the luggage space for a weekend away for two, while the Roma gets those rear seats – but only for kids.

All three turn heads, but the Aston is most likely to bend ears, too

HALF-PRICE HEROES

FERRARI CALIFORNIA T, 2015/64, £74,995

Early examples of the Roma's predecessor had a lukewarm reception when new. But the addition of a 3.8-litre turbo motor, revised suspension and styling tweaks delivered a car fit to wear the prancing horse badge.



ASTON MARTIN DB11 VOLANTE, 2019/19, £83,995

If you like the Vantage's style and hand-finished luxury but want something a bit easier-going, then a lightly used DB11 is hard to resist. It gets the same 4.0 V8, so expect the same sledgehammer pace and characterful backing track.

McLAREN 650S SPIDER, 2014/64, £76,995

No car in Woking's back catalogue covers the same bases as the Artura, but hefty depreciation means the 650S offers open-top thrills at a fraction of the cost. Even at this price you will find cars with fewer than 20k miles on the clock.

◂ place the nose of the car just so. And as the cornering forces build and your confidence grows, you can use the V8's predictable power delivery to subtly alter your cornering angle with a delicate right foot. Yet it's the way the Ferrari flows down the road, working with the surface rather than against it, that really impresses.

Climb into the Aston Martin immediately afterwards and the contrast couldn't be clearer. There's the same classic front-engined, rear-wheel-drive balance that allows you to throw some oversteery shapes on corner exit, but the Vantage is a more overtly aggressive proposition that leaves you in no doubt that it wants to be taken seriously as a sports car.

There's no more feedback through the steering compared with the Roma, but it requires more muscle to turn. You also get a smidge less understeer: the Vantage's nose responds more quickly and crisply. At sensible speeds it feels a fraction more agile and alert, and that sense is underlined by a damping set-up that veers between stiff in baseline Sport mode and brain-shakingly rigid in Track. In all settings the extra firmness highlights the slightly weaker shell (the Roadster's structure shakes the most over bumps), which also results in quite a few creaks and squeaks from the cabin architecture.

Go a little harder over these bucking and weaving Welsh roads and the Aston's mass starts to tell. You sense the Vantage's brakes working harder to slow it down, while mid-corner bumps and crests cause brief heart-in-mouth moments as the suspension skips over rather than soaks up imperfections, causing a little step sideways that leaves the already wide Aston with even less margin for error on its side of the road. It's an exciting and extroverted thing but, like a manic comedian who's always 'on', it can become tiring.

Slip into the McLaren's trademark low-slung driving position and you know you're behind the wheel of a proper driver's car. The straight-

Aston's (AMG) V8 shouts its 656bhp from the rooftops

Artura is most potent with 690bhp but can run in electric silence

Delivery of Roma's twin-turbo V8 feels naturally aspirated

Welsh B-roads aren't their natural habitat, but all three impressed

1ST The elegant Roma serves up the perfect blend of glamour and gorblimey, its sublime chassis delivering an unbeatable combination of GT ride and high-jinx handling.

legged layout, perfectly placed and slim-rimmed steering wheel and panoramic view ahead make you feel right at home immediately. With its carbonfibre tub, the Spider is also pretty much as structurally solid as the coupé, which is our reigning Britain's Best Driver's Car champ, and that means this drop-top is every bit as brilliant to punt down these wicked Welsh roads.

It offers a very different experience from its rivals here, though. The Artura is perhaps the most expressive McLaren yet, but its dizzyingly high limits mean on-the-road pleasure is derived not from its ability to be steered at will by your right foot but in its tactility and precision. The hydraulically assisted steering offers exceptional weighting and feel, writhing gently in your hands, while there's an equally uninhibited flow of information through the seat of your pants.

With a low polar moment of inertia and Gorilla Glue grip, the Artura doesn't really do understeer or oversteer on the road: you simply point the nose where you want to go and the rest of the car follows in a beautifully neutral stance. It's hugely satisfying, but there's also a sense you're scratching the surface and that to really extend and exploit the Spider you need the gloves-off, helmet-on environs of a circuit.

Does that undermine the McLaren's bid for victory in this company? That's a tough one because – cliché klaxon alert – there are no real losers in this test. Each of these cars has a distinctive character and, depending on your needs and mood, you could happily make space on your driveway for any one of these special sun-worshippers. However, we don't pull punches here at Autocar, so here we go…

Bottom step of the podium, if only just, is the Aston. It's a hugely charismatic machine and the least costly to buy, but the firm ride, extra weight and shouty exhaust mean it can become just a tad overbearing with continued exposure. As for the other two, can we have joint winners? No? Oh, okay. The thing is, each is different enough in its approach that those with deep enough pockets could make an argument to justify having both.

Let's assume, though, that you'll use these cars more often than not, in which case the Ferrari's narrow practicality advantage and ability to serve as both sybaritic luxury saloon (of sorts) and spirit-lifting sportster means it gets the nod by the width of one of its many layers of roof insulation. Ask the question again tomorrow, however, and the answer may change. Either way, getting a tan has never been so much fun.

	FERRARI ROMA SPIDER	**McLAREN ARTURA SPIDER**	**ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE ROADSTER**
Rating	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★☆
Price	£210,883	£221,500	£180,500
Engine	V8, 3855cc, twin-turbo, petrol	V6, 2993cc, twin-turbo, petrol, plus electric motor	V8, 3892cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power	612bhp at 5750-7500rpm	690bhp at 7500rpm	656bhp at 6000rpm
Torque	561lb ft at 3000-5750rpm	531lb ft at 2250rpm	590lb ft at 2000-5000rpm
Gearbox	8-spd dual-clutch automatic, RWD	8-spd dual-clutch automatic, RWD	8-spd automatic, RWD
Kerb weight	1556kg (dry)	1560kg	1805kg
0-62mph	3.4sec	3.0sec	3.6sec
Top speed	199mph	205mph	202mph
Battery	na	9.7/7.4kWh (total/usable)	na
Economy	24.8mpg	58.9mpg	23.0mpg
Electric range	na	21 miles	na
CO$_2$, tax band	258g/km, 37%	108g/km, 27%	279g/km, 37%

2ND **If you value driver involvement and outright speed above all, the McLaren is for you. However, it doesn't slip quite as easily into more mundane duties as the Ferrari.**

3RD **Rabble-rousing, rambunctious Aston is a laugh-out-loud hoot if you're in the mood, but unforgiving ride and look-at-me character means it can become overbearing.**

Y27 MCL
BD25 PFY

The French collection

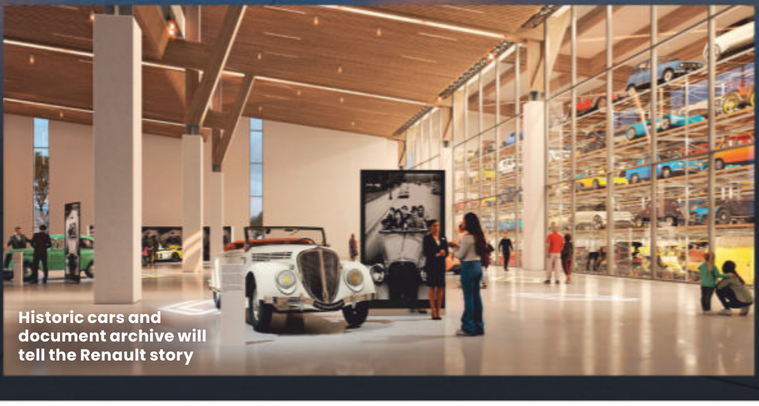
Renault is set to celebrate its storied past with a new museum at its historic Flins factory near Paris. **ALEX WOLSTENHOLME** enjoys a preview

The history of Renault is rich. Founded in 1899, the manufacturer quickly became a force in engineering, racing and luxury, not only making family cars, trucks and buses, but also winning the Monte Carlo Rally with the 9.1-litre 40CV and building aero engines.

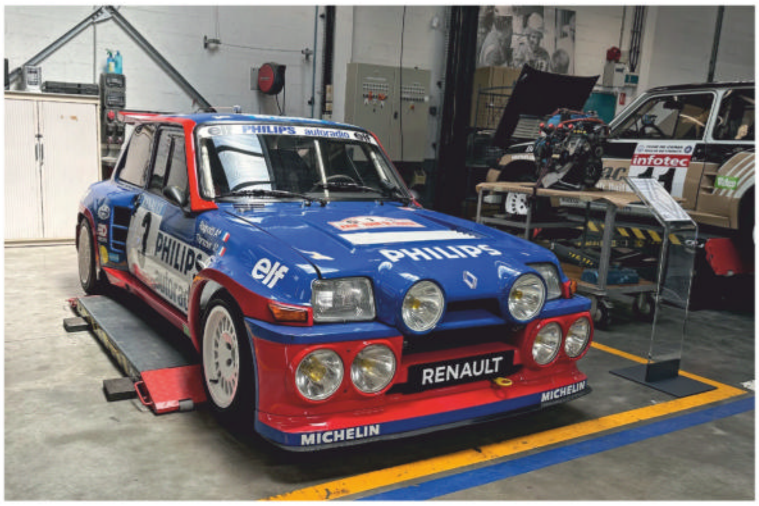
Between the wars, Renault's conservative line-up allowed Citroën to become the largest car maker in France – at least until the latter's first bankruptcy.

After the Second World War, Renault moved firmly into the mass market. Having endured another 80 years of worldwide turmoil since then, including one CEO being assassinated and another being imprisoned in and then escaping from Japan, it is currently thriving.

To celebrate this, in 2027 Renault will open a museum within its Flins factory – a place that has seen 18 million finished cars pass through the gates. We got a sneak peek at what will feature in the 800-strong collection spanning Renault's early history to the modern day.

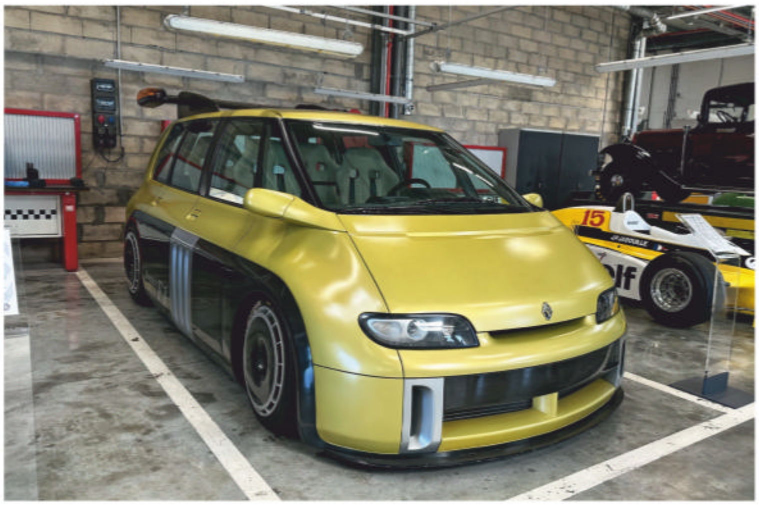


Historic cars and document archive will tell the Renault story



1985 MAXI 5 TURBO

The ultimate version of the 5 was, like many of the meanest '80s machines, created for Group B rallying. Power rose from the standard 5 Turbo's 158bhp to a massive 345bhp. Drive, from the mid-mounted 1.6-litre engine, was to the rear wheels, which prevented it from consistently challenging 4WD rivals such as the Audi Quattro. Still, its competitiveness was impressive, and it claimed four WRC victories and numerous wins at national level.



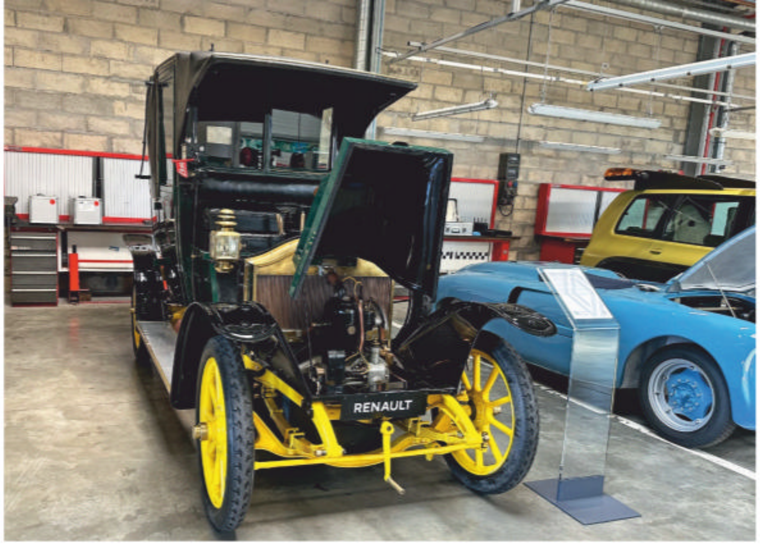
1994 ESPACE F1

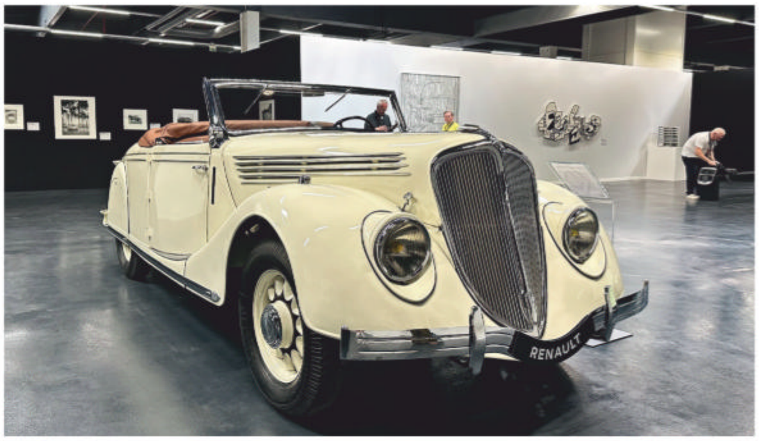
Two 3.5-litre V10-engined Espaces were built as a collaboration between Matra (who built the Espace), the Williams Formula 1 team and Williams' engine supplier Renault. There wasn't really much Espace in it at all: it had a carbonfibre chassis and body, a mid-mounted F1 V10, a six-speed paddle-shift gearbox and rear-wheel drive. It had only four seats, too. Still, does that matter when it has 750bhp, weighs 1100kg and can do 0-62mph in 2.8sec?

Renault will house its vehicle collection in a new Flins facility, depicted in these two images

1910 TYPE AG

As one of the first taxis by design, the Type AG became synonymous with Hackney carriages in London, New York and, of course, Paris. They replaced horse-drawn carriages, and one of the big draws for drivers was that the fuel tank was swappable, so taxis shared between drivers could be run without disputes over who was using whose fuel. The Type AG earned legendary status in France when the government called on Parisian taxis, most of which were Renaults, to transport 4000 soldiers to the Battle of the Marne.



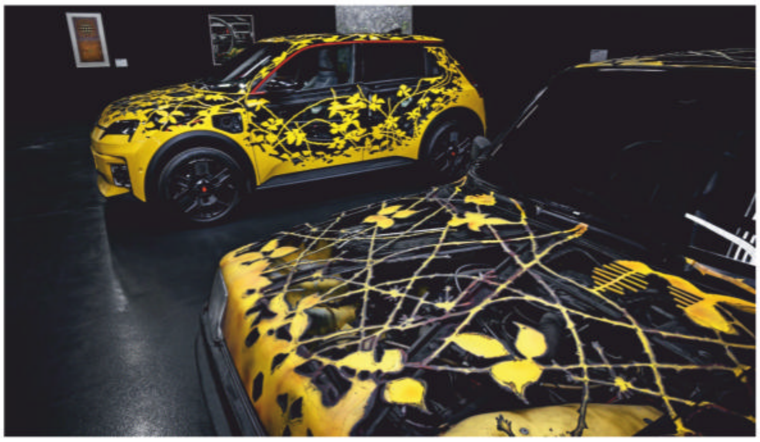


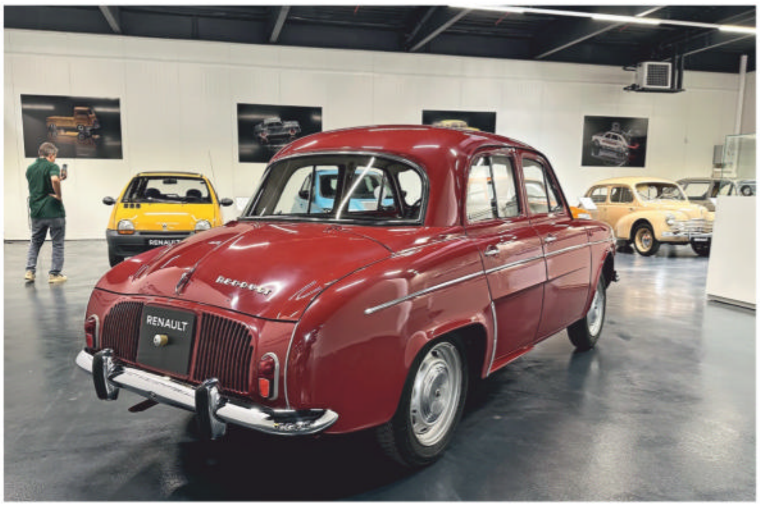
1935 VIVA GRAND SPORT

Renault started out producing expensive luxury cars, and this carried on until the Second World War. With a 4.1-litre straight six and almost 100bhp, the Viva Grand Sport was a big statement at the time, both physically and financially. This version is the Type ACX1, a three-seat convertible (there's an extra dickie seat in the boot) penned by aeronautical designer Marcel Riffard. It was based on the more conservatively styled Vivastella, which was available in six-seat saloon and convertible bodystyles.

DAN RAWLINGS' 5s

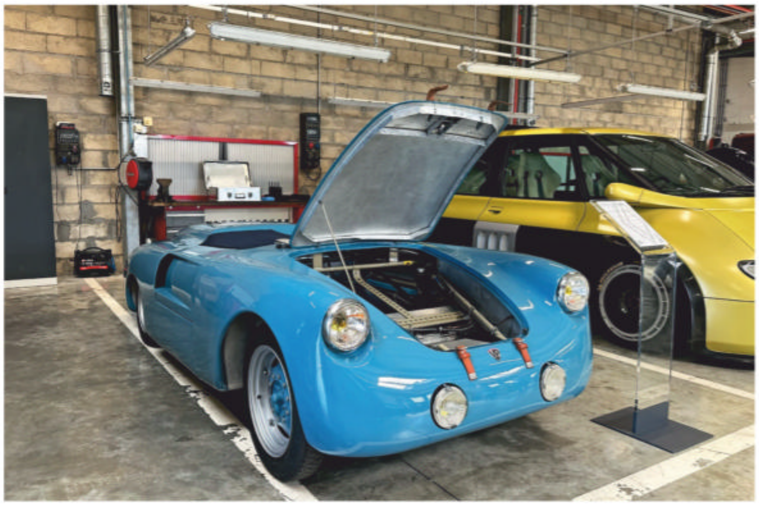
Renault is showcasing more than just its cars in its new museum: it sees itself as a cultural institution in France, and that is reflected in art acquired or commissioned by the brand, this exhibit being the latter. British artist Dan Rawlings is known for his delicate metal lace cutout work, and for this project he worked in residence in the Douai factory to create by hand this pair of 5s with plasma-cut bodywork. All Rawlings' works are inspired by nature, and this time it was the vegetation around Douai, in the form of intertwined brambles.





1968 DAUPHINE GORDINI

Perhaps the car with the closest connection to Flins is the humble rear-engined Dauphine. This was inexpensive transport to replace the 4CV, but it reflected France's economic recovery. It was built for refinement, so it could travel at 100kph on the new autoroutes and better 40mpg. More than one million were built from 1956, and the 'sporty' Gordini version lasted until 1968 – 0-62mph took 'just' 27sec, 10sec faster than the standard model.



1952 4CV BARQUETTE BY VERNET PAIRARD

This is one that even the most devout Renault fans may struggle to name, but isn't it pretty? The standard 4CV was the first French car to sell more than one million units, and Just-Emile Vernet and Jean Pairard managed to turn it into a 24-hour Le Mans racer called the 1064. Despite the 904cc engine, the streamlined body helped the car break eight records, including the 2000km record at an average of 103.2mph.

METAL WILL NEVER DIE

Steel has been a mainstay in car manufacture for over a century, says **STEPHEN DOBIE**, and its relevance shows no signs of dimming

What happened to good old steel? It's been at the core of mainstream cars since the early 20th century, and the Ford Model T was a key catalyst in its industry takeover by the 1930s. Aluminium and carbonfibre panels higher up the automotive food chain have dimmed some of its lustre in recent years, but incoming recyclability targets may ensure steel has a long, bright future.

World Auto Steel, the automotive arm of the World Steel Association, brings together 18 major global steel producers with the aim of advancing the material to meet the automotive industry's increasingly strict needs "in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way". A big ask, but those leading the way are an exuberant bunch.

"Steel has been around the automotive industry for more than 100 years and has been a primary structural material in the car's history," says technical director George Coates. "It has evolved quite dramatically: just 35 years ago the most common automotive materials had strength levels of around 300 megapascals, while today we have applications at 1900 megapascals."

For those wondering, megapascals measure pressure, and 1900 of them is rather a lot – it's the sort of pressure level generated by high-end scientific instruments.

Stronger, 'ultra-high-tensile' steels are a great way to retain the intrinsic benefits of steel – namely its proficiency in crash tests and affordability versus more complex alternatives – while stripping some weight, which is a big help when electrification has thus far ballooned the kerb weights of even small cars. World Auto Steel has partnered Ricardo on a project called Steel E-Motive, a ride-sharing concept that's exploring higher-tensile products to help convince car makers of the benefits.

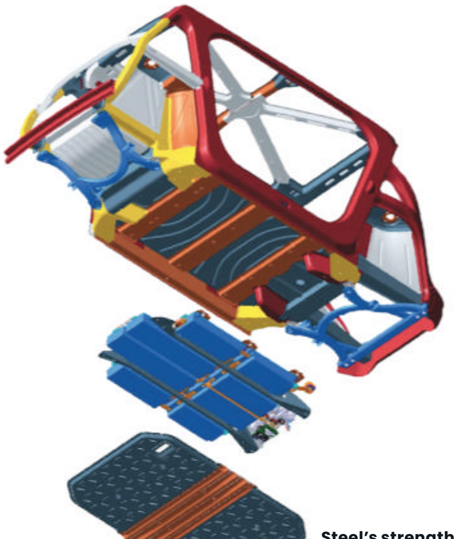
"We've gone around the world talking to the automotive OEMs and the feedback has been really fabulous," says Coates. "They've been blown away by the strength level that's been achieved. We're able to put a very specific grade of steel in the right part of the car for the right functionality. Not only that, but the steel companies can further tweak the material's properties during its manufacture. We can really tailor individual components for their intended use. That's something I think is quite unique to the steel industry."

Steel also has the benefit of high recyclability, claiming an impressively low loss rate when it's processed as scrap. Russ Balzer, another technical director at World Auto Steel, adds: "The number we use in the modelling for recycling process loss is 4-5%. Steel has been used for so long that its makers have become really efficient. A lot of investment and evolution has also gone into galvanising the use of stainless steels and aluminising [a surface treatment where aluminium acts as a protective layer]. Exhausts don't really rust any more because of this."

While steel is heavier than some alternative materials, Balzer doesn't see that as an issue in the pursuit of lightweighting EVs. "The dawn of advanced high-strength steels is a key requirement to help strip weight from electric cars, and of course there is some incentive to do so," he says. "But one thing that I think has outpaced its projections is the lowering of battery costs for vehicles. As battery technologies improve, and their densities increase, it reduces the benefit of lightweighting somewhat.

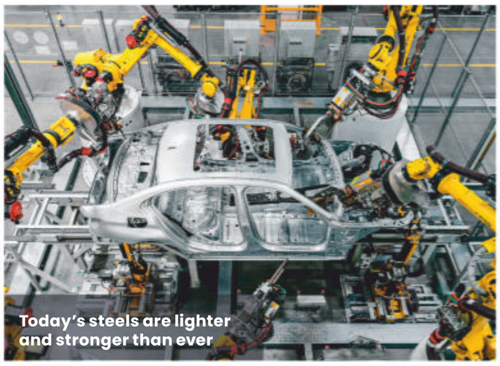
"Battery protection is an area where the strength and energy absorption of steel can come in. When we get to solid-state technology, protection of the battery becomes even more important. This is where this tailoring of different grades of steel and being able to use the appropriate grade in the right place is a huge benefit – not only in the ultimate mass of the vehicle, but also in terms of lifetime cost and crash-test performance."

In an ever-tumultuous car market whose goalposts frequently shift, steel looks like being a constant for decades to come.



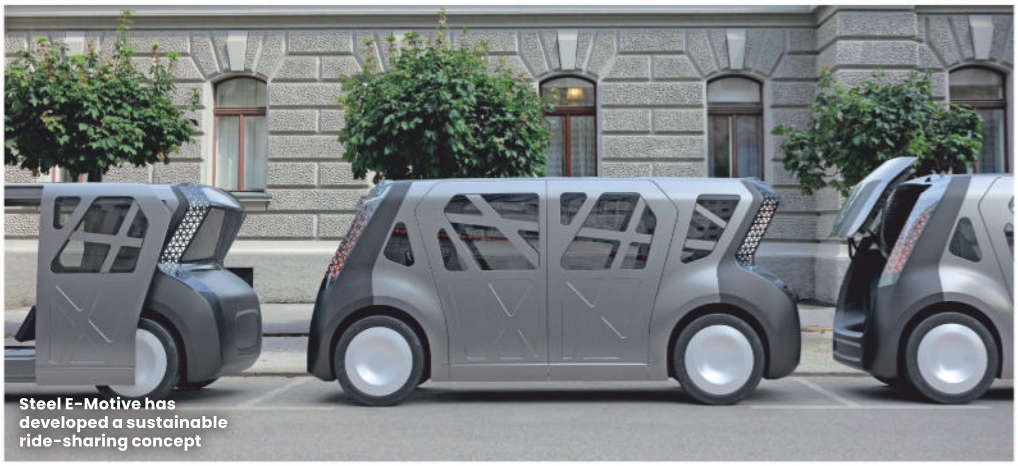
Steel's strength is key to protecting vulnerable electric car battery packs

Model T Ford production made steel the go-to material for automotive



Today's steels are lighter and stronger than ever

"High-strength steels are key to stripping weight from electric cars"



Steel E-Motive has developed a sustainable ride-sharing concept

STEEL'S CLEANER FUTURE

"Working with car makers is a dance, a choreographed exchange of information," says Nick Silk, Tata Steel UK's product management boss. He talks me through electric arc furnace steel manufacture, which can create new steel using up to 100% scrap material – versus around 30% via blast furnace.

"We need to tell manufacturers how we plan to make steel in the future, what the carbon footprint of that would be and when it will be available," he continues. "They need to look at their model and decide which parts they will change to electric arc furnace manufacture. There will be a gradual decarbonisation of their vehicles."

The recipe needs high-quality ingredients, which means working together with the scrap industry to improve their supply. "Better scrap quality comes from better separation," says Silk. "Let's get the wiring looms out of the scrap before we shred it because that copper is unhelpful – and a waste of copper.

"The UK is a massive generator of scrap but not a massive consumer of it. It's exporting nearly seven million tonnes of scrap per year. We think we can use that instead of making entirely new steel. We really want to focus on a closed-loop scenario: working with scrap suppliers to make UK scrap fit for use here rather than good enough to export and make some cash from."

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"It makes you feel like François Delecour on a Tarmac rally stage"

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 13,142**

SUZUKI SWIFT

Could a traditional supermini still cut it in an age of sophistication?

WHY WE RAN IT To see if this latest incarnation has maintained that trademark no-frills appeal

Time and again we've seen the humble hatch's resilience tested. Public desire for two-tonne SUVs and big-name manufacturers' claims they can no longer turn a profit developing and selling small cars have made sure of that.

The list of reasons why city cars and the like are vanishing goes on – and it makes me sad. Which is why I'm so glad that Suzuki has persevered through the challenges to continue making an excellent small car in the shape of the Swift.

My time with this pint-sized beauty has been wonderful. I wasn't quite sure what to expect initially, because I'd been running a Vauxhall Corsa Hybrid beforehand, and that hadn't been a shining beacon of excellence for the small car oeuvre, with its woeful ride, sub-par visibility and hefty price.

Thankfully, the Swift turned out to be a breath of fresh air compared with that Corsa. As soon as you get in to the compact Suzuki, you notice that everything is just that bit nicer. The interior materials immediately feel more pleasant to the touch, and the dashboard and control layout is slightly more intuitive. There is also a plethora of real, physical buttons in an easily accessed place below the central screen.

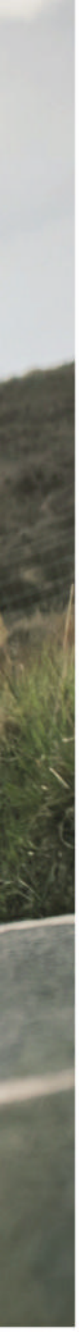
Things continue to improve from there. One of my favourite attributes of the Swift is its (relatively) huge windscreen paired with a very low scuttle and dash. It has the effect of making this small car feel so much bigger inside by letting in loads of light. Naturally, it allows for great sight lines, too, especially with the A-pillars sited so far back, which provides fantastic mid-corner visibility.

Naturally aspirated three-cylinder engine sounded the part and was frugal and fun

SECOND OPINION

I've got a soft spot for the Swift. It's a fun, charming little thing that shines in town, aided by its nimble agility and super economy. Motorway runs can feel a bit tiring, though, with road and wind noise creeping in at speed. Still, aside from those long stints, it's a remarkable hatchback. **SA**

It's also useful around town. The Swift is far and away the easiest car I've ever had to parallel park, with loads of steering lock, tiny overhangs and a really clear reversing camera. Add in a boot that's big enough for the weekly shop – thanks to a surprisingly deep floor – plus a cabin that's comfortable for four and only



Compact footprint and excellent visibility make it a cinch to park

Deep floor swells boot space to useful levels; weekly shop no issue

Wheel-at-each-corner stance looks good and benefits agility

Paint choice was our car's only optional extra, at £850 – money well spent

slightly uncomfortable for five, and you've got the perfect city car.

Its diminutive footprint helps with all of this. To put that into perspective, at 3860mm long the Swift is a substantial 500mm shorter than a current BMW 1 Series, and it's 65mm narrower than that car. Paired with the well-weighted steering, this size makes it a true joy to whizz around town in.

So it's great in an urban environment, but where I think it really shines is out in the sticks, where it reveals itself to be a secret driver's delight. As economical as that three-cylinder engine is, it's also a characterful motor when pushed. What it wants for in torque it makes up for in sound, emitting a noise like a rally car as it buzzes away up front. And I have to mention the gorgeous gearshift: it slots so smoothly into each gear, and the pedals are perfectly spaced for some heel-and-toe action.

The wheel-at-each-corner layout helps the car to be nimble, with amazing turn-in ability. It makes you feel like François Delecour on a Tarmac rally stage and serves as a reminder of how great the small, light hatchback can be, bringing to mind classics such as the Peugeot 205 GTi. This is where the Swift stands above something like the similarly priced Hyundai Inster. That car is roomier inside, narrower outside and just as cheap, but it's nowhere near as much fun when you're behind the wheel.

If it's the old-school characteristics that make the Swift so great, then it's the new regulatory features that make it not quite as good as it could be.

In their operation, the ADAS functions are the most infuriatingly poor I've yet to encounter, with driver detection that goes off if you look out of the window to see if a roundabout is clear, lane keeping assist that seems intent on dragging you off the road and an ear-piercing speed 'beep' that berates you for transgressing over the speed limit, which all too often it has read incorrectly. That speed setting is hidden in a menu on the central screen, too, and can't be deactivated on the move. At least the lane keeping assist can be switched off with a small button underneath the ignition switch, although it's right next to the one for the traction control, and I've lost count of the times I've hit that instead.

The central screen isn't a strong point, either. It will interrupt your Apple CarPlay session to tell you it might be cold outside by way of a 1990s-style bar notification slowly loading on the display, and if you get another interruption (usually it's for low fuel), the bar for that will load on top of the previous one, giving you two irritating distractions that need to be tapped away.

Neither of those nitpicks can detract from the Swift's compactly proportioned greatness, though. The small hatch has life in it yet.
JACK HARRISON

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jack.harrison@haymarket.com

TEST DATA

SUZUKI SWIFT 1.2 MILD HYBRID ULTRA

MILEAGE

At start 2101
At end 13,142

PRICES

List price new £20,799
List price now £20,799
Price as tested £21,649

OPTIONS

Burning Red and Super Black paint £850

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 64.2mpg
Fuel tank 37 litres
Test average 56.0mpg
Test best 61.7mpg
Test worst 52.3mpg
Real-world range 456 miles

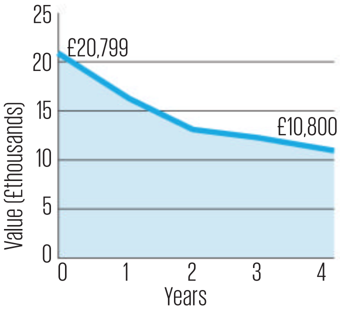
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 12.5sec
Top speed 103mph
Engine 3 cyls, 1197cc, petrol
Max power 81bhp at 5700rpm
Max torque 83lb ft at 4500rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, FWD
Boot 265 litres
Wheels 16in, alloy
Tyres 185/55 R16
Kerb weight 949kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £205 pcm
CO_2 99g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Fuel costs £1308.69
Running costs including fuel £1308.69
Cost per mile 12 pence
Faults Dashboard rattle, reluctance to start

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

26 Mar, 2 Apr, 30 Apr, 7 May, 21 May, 4 Jun

LOVE IT

OLD-SCHOOL DIALS
It's so rare to see actual dials instead of a dash-mounted screen these days. They're nicely spaced here, too.

CH-CH-CH-CHANGES
I sincerely believe that this is the greatest gear linkage found on anything this side of a Porsche 911.

ROUGH-ROAD PROWESS
It sails over lumps and bumps far more smoothly than many of its rivals and has great ground clearance for terrible surfaces.

COHESIVE DESIGN
The looks have really grown on me, with sharp-looking front and rear lights contrasting neatly with rounded edges elsewhere.

LOATHE IT

NOISY AT CRUISING SPEED
The cabin is far from quiet at motorway speeds, with wind noise coming from above and road roar from below.

FIRST REPORT

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE

Plush PHEV arrives with a mission to be as desirable and relevant as ever

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To ascertain if this upmarket compact SUV can still hold its own in the face of fresher competition

If there was ever an era-defining car for a marque, the Evoque is the ultimate example. This entry-level Range Rover catapulted what was then Jaguar Land Rover (now JLR) into a new sphere of success. The sight of the mini Range Rover, closely related in style to its iconic big sibling, became the norm across the country and it was, anecdotally, the new favourite for middle-class mums doing the school run.

That all may be true, but has it managed to stay relevant in the fast-changing landscape of compact SUVs over the past decade? We've taken on our new long-termer quite far into its second generation, which has received plenty of mild updates over its six-year lifespan.

On its arrival, it struck me that, appearance-wise at least, this latest Evoque feels bang up to date, with modern exterior styling and an impressively slick interior.

Ours is the all-singing, all-dancing version. Its full name on the specification sheet is: Range Rover Evoque Autobiography Petrol Plug-in Hybrid Ingenium 1.5-litre 3-cylinder 269HP Turbocharged Petrol PHEV (Automatic) All Wheel Drive. And breathe.

This plug-in hybrid is the most expensive, but there are also petrol and diesel mild hybrids, starting from £44,755. They're called the D165 diesel mild hybrid, D200 diesel mild hybrid and the P160 petrol mild hybrid. This PHEV used to be called the P270e, but confusingly that seems to have been dropped and it's simply titled 'Petrol Plug-in Hybrid' on the website configurator.

It's powered by the JLR Ingenium 1.5-litre turbo petrol alongside an electric motor, which delivers 29 emission-free miles of real-world range. That seems pretty poor these days. Its BMW X1 rival, for instance, has a claimed EV range of around 50 miles. But the argument goes that the average distance travelled daily in the UK is 19 miles, so it shouldn't be a problem. Let's see. The combined 265bhp and 398lb ft of this set-up enables 0-62mph in a very respectable 6.8sec, on the way to a top speed of 118mph.

The options list (see 'Test data', right) makes for interesting reading. It's all personal preference, of course, but I reckon the £705 Tribeca Blue paint is worth it. I'm not so sure about the £650 contrast bronze roof complete with accents. A couple of friends have praised it, however. The priciest option is a £715 Comfort pack, which includes configurable cabin lighting, two-zone climate control and cabin air purification.

There's a sliding panoramic sunroof, which is a no-cost option yet configurable dynamics cost

Bronze highlights and roof cost £650 extra; the blue paint (left) was £705

RANGE ROVER
KM25 FON

"So far, this has been an effortless car to assimilate into daily life"

Burgess is a fan of the car's plush interior and its general ease of driving

Its design wears its years well; the bigger test will be of what lies beneath it

£235. I'd probably expect to pay for the first and not the second. These days, you also pay £170 for a reduced-size spare wheel…

Because this is a top-of-the-range Autobiography, the standard specification is high: an 11.4in touchscreen; wireless charging; heated windscreen, washers and steering wheel; and 3D surround camera, plus all the required driving assistance systems.

Climbing into the Evoque is a pleasant experience. The minimalist interior feels relevant and modern. It's dark in that safe but boring way so many cars are today, but there's no question it feels plush and refined.

The fabrics are Kvadrat and Ultrafabrics, two trademarked names, both of which are materials offered as a sustainable alternative to leather and I prefer them. They are soft to touch and comfortable.

When JLR revamped its infotainment system a few years ago, it elevated the set-up back to where it should have been in the first place and that remains true today. Apple CarPlay connected easily at first go, and even though I would still prefer analogue buttons for the climate control, this is one of the more intuitive systems.

My first objection in the car came from the speed limit bong, which is loud and annoying. That's perhaps the point, but my previous long-termer, a Bentley Bentayga, did a far superior job of creating an audio alert that didn't instantly rankle. As with all cars, I'll need to turn it off every time I start the car or else put up with it when I mistakenly go 1mph over the limit. That's an early complaint, but the other ADAS functions have been unobtrusive.

So far, this has been an effortless car to assimilate into daily life, both tootling around town and on longer journeys. Having come out of the Bentayga, this (unsurprisingly) feels compact: big enough to feel there is ample space inside but small enough to park easily and thread down narrow streets.

As well as that convenience factor, it feels luxurious and cosseting, both in its quality finishes and the experience behind the wheel. It may be ageing but early signs show it's largely holding its own.
RACHEL BURGESS

TEST DATA

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE AUTOBIOGRAPHY PHEV

Price new £58,275 **Price as tested** £62,975 **Options** Comfort pack £715, Tribeca Blue paint £705, Corinthia Bronze contrast roof £650, heated and cooled front seats £500, privacy glass £450, wi-fi enabled with data plan £440, Secure Tracker Pro £340, heated rear seats £300, configurable dynamics £235, front foglights £195, reduced-section steel spare wheel £170 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 185.8mpg (WLTP)

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rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

SECOND OPINION

The Evoque should be an interesting car to revisit. Great when it was launched, it has been left to wither on the vine. It's now two generations behind on PHEV tech and its interior was de-contented a few years ago. I was disappointed when I tested one for a week, but longer exposure might improve my impression. **IV**

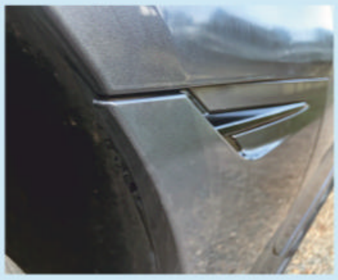
SNAPSHOTS

MINI ACEMAN

Mileage 1821 **Last seen** 9.7.25
Parking up next to a Paceman recently got me thinking about Mini's odd three-door SUV, which was ultimately binned after four years to avoid cannibalising Countryman sales. Mini learned its SUVs needed to be easily distinguishable and that's why the Aceman and Countryman are so different. They sit on different platforms, are distinct enough in size, and the Aceman is EV-only. Good job, Mini. **MSc**

BMW 1 SERIES

Mileage 5676 **Last seen** 9.7.25
I've been so busy discussing the merits of my 120's many options that I haven't once highlighted that, despite the best efforts of my right foot (and they're pretty strong efforts), it has consistently surpassed 45mpg. I wonder how much of that is owed to the new 48V mild-hybrid system. Such things are virtually never celebrated; perhaps they ought to be. **KC**



MG CYBERSTER

Mileage 4345 **Last seen** 16.7.25
Lots of car makers like some kind of slash on the front wing. It makes a car look dramatic but can also be used as a genuine aerodynamic or cooling device. The Cyberster gets one. There are very small vents on the edge of the inner wheel arch, so it will reduce air pressure in that area, and channel it along the edge of the car. It will only make a small difference, one imagines, but on an EV it all counts. **MP**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY AN ALFA ROMEO STELVIO

WHEN ALFA WENT TOP OF THE SPORTY SUV CLASS

The accessible Stelvio balances practicality with real driver appeal

Launched in 2017, the Stelvio was a radical departure for Alfa Romeo, although the firm waited longer than many rivals before launching an SUV. But as then CEO Reid Bigland said at the unveiling: "The Stelvio is an Alfa Romeo first and an SUV second."

True to his word, Alfa gave us a head-turning high-rider that was as desirable as its talented German contemporaries and delivered no small dynamic edge.

Today, just £11,000 will get you into an early high-miler, but playing it safer at £15,000 will net a cleaner example with a more reasonable mileage. The Stelvio is (just about) still on sale and has only been minimally updated during its eight-year history, so whatever your choice, it won't look outdated.

Several trims were available at launch: Stelvio, Super, Speciale and Milano Edizione. Stelvio and Super have a 6.5in infotainment screen, cruise control, front and rear parking sensors and a powered tailgate, but we would aim for mid-rung Speciale. It gets 19in wheels, bi-xenon headlights and aluminium interior brightwork, and it was popular so you will have no issue finding a well-maintained example.

You can choose between a 197bhp or 276bhp 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine, or a 2.2-litre turbo diesel with either 188bhp or 207bhp. The petrols are smooth and generally refined, but the more potent 276bhp lump encourages you to drive the Stelvio with a verve and enthusiasm that's uncommon in this segment.

The lesser-spotted diesels are

Tech and kit are decent in base trims, but Speciale and above are most generous

What we said then

3 JANUARY 2018

"BMW, Jaguar and Porsche were all quicker on the draw and have benefited significantly as a result. However, we'd suggest that none of those companies has been as successful as Alfa Romeo in translating its brand values to an elevated platform."

responsive and torquey, the 207bhp, 354lb ft option particularly so. It sings a more clattery tune, but it's refined at a cruise and will do close to 50mpg. Some might say choosing a diesel Alfa is like ordering a ham and pineapple pizza in a family-run Italian restaurant: borderline sacrilegious. But if you're regularly carrying the family or towing, it's actually a sensible all-rounder.

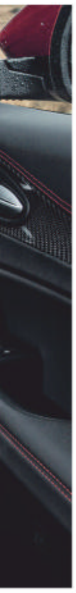
The polar opposite of an all-rounder is the fire-breathing Stelvio Quadrifoglio, with its twin-turbo 2.9-litre V6 making 503bhp and 443lb ft for 0-62mph in 4.0sec. It has a fairly firm ride and a shortfall of SUV versatility, and you will do well to get 25mpg out of it. They are scandalously cheap to buy now, though, with prices starting from £30,000 for earlier cars. But cast a careful eye over the service history.

In any trim the Stelvio will appeal to those who want a family car that doubles as a thrill-seeker. Using the Giulia's lightweight aluminium platform, the Stelvio weighs just 1659kg, so it's far leaner than rivals like the Jaguar F-Pace and Porsche Macan, and on a twisty road it lives up to its alpine namesake. Its rear-biased four-wheel drive set-up brings balance and poise in corners, and the quick steering carried over from the Giulia means it's as good to drive as its saloon sibling. That handling prowess comes at the cost of ride comfort, however, with the Stelvio's firm set-up becoming detrimental over rougher surfaces – albeit not unbearably so.

Move inside and some chinks in the Stelvio's armour appear. Overall it's nicely appointed and a pleasant thing in which to cover miles, but it lacks the material richness and refinement of the Audi Q5 and BMW X3. The sloping roofline reduces head room in the rear, too, so there's less space for adults in the back.

That being said, the Stelvio is still a practical cruiser, and with 525 litres of boot space you will have no trouble loading it up with luggage, bikes or the family dog.

SAM PHILLIPS



The Stelvio sacrifices some ride comfort for real B-road engagement

"The Stelvio Quadrifoglio is scandalously cheap to buy now, with prices starting from £30,000"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

ANDREW BURFORD

"I purchased a 2020 Stelvio 2.0 petrol that was 18 months old and had 8000 miles on it, and I found it to be a comfortable and capable SUV. The ride felt like a sports car and it had plenty of power in D mode – and it returned around 30mpg. As time and miles were added, one day the battery failed, and while it didn't stop me from using it, it did throw up some errors. I also had an issue with the coil pack. Alfa Romeo wanted a fortune for new parts so I went old-school and had the leads varnished, which cured it."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

Damaged hoses or a broken radiator can cause coolant leaks and overheating. A new radiator will cost around £350 to replace.

Power control module problems can manifest as a sudden loss of power, sluggish acceleration or the engine stalling. Watch for a warning light on the dashboard, too. Misfires or reduced performance can be caused by a faulty coil pack; replacements are expensive, but you can get the leads revarnished (see above).

■ ELECTRICS

Battery failures aren't uncommon. A laggy or unresponsive infotainment screen is often caused by electrical glitches, but a system reset should cure it.

Other electrical gremlins include headlights randomly shutting off, malfunctioning windscreen wipers and warning lights on the dashboard.

■ BRAKES

Brake fluid leaks can limit stopping power, so make sure the brakes have plenty of bite on a test drive.

■ WHEELS

Check diamond-cut alloys for milky patches of corrosion – known as 'white worm'.

■ BODY

Unlikely to have been off-roaded regularly, but it's a 4x4 SUV so check the underside, bumpers and trims for any damage.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

All versions use an eight-speed automatic gearbox, and all but the entry-level diesel come with four-wheel drive as standard.

Milano Edizione, the launch specification for the Stelvio, came with bigger alloy wheels and a 10-speaker stereo, and those cars cost £2000-£3000 more than a Speciale. Nero Edizione trim ('black edition' to you and me) arrived later, with a black grille, black trim and black wheels.

The Stelvio received a light nip and tuck for 2024, with new headlights and daytime-running lights, plus upgrades to the interior technology. Trims were changed to match the Giulia and included Sprint, Veloce and Competizione.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£11,000-£17,999

Plenty of Stelvio Speciales available. Age and mileage vary, but a good mix of petrol and diesel engines.

£18,000-£25,999

A broader mix of trims, plus newer examples with more reasonable mileages.

£26,000-£34,999

Petrol dominates here. Some high-mileage Quadrifoglios available too.

£35,000-£44,999

Facelifted cars with low mileages and either a full service history or one previous owner.

£45,000 AND ABOVE

Nearly new 2.0-litre petrol models with delivery mileage. Lots of Quadrifoglios to choose from, of varying ages.

ONE WE FOUND

ALFA ROMEO STELVIO 2.9 V6 QUADRIFOGLIO, 35,000 MILES, £35,995

If you've got to have the V6, £36k for a 69-plate Quadrifoglio is a steal for a 503bhp SUV that will keep up with the super-saloons at the Nürburgring. It has a full dealer service history and looks the part in Misano Blue.

My car & I

In my Humvee I'm ready for action, man

"I grew up playing with figures like Action Man and not video games, so to own a Humvee like the one he drove is a dream come true," says Samuel Ogunlana. Note, it's a Humvee, the US military vehicle – full name High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle – that first saw action in 1989 in Operation Just Cause, when the US invaded Panama, and not a Hummer, the popular civilian utility vehicle that looks a lot like it. Both were built by AM General, although the Hummer was marketed by General Motors.

At 2160mm wide (7ft 1in in old money), finished in khaki green and sitting on 37in wheels shod with tractor-like tyres, it's impossible to miss among the pristine Ferraris and Porsches gathered at Samuel's local car meet. "It's a proper military vehicle with no comforts," explains Samuel. "No sound deadening, no air-con and no power assistance. Because much of it extends into the cabin, you may get some heat from the engine on a cold day, but that's your lot."

Said engine is a 6.5-litre naturally aspirated V8 diesel. Samuel says: "It makes 170bhp, but it's the torque – 290lb ft – that matters. There are two batteries, each weighing 75kg, and it has a 48V electrical system

Our cars

Feelin' ready, lookin' fine, this awesome MX-5 is mine

BY CHARLIE MARTIN

Having come to terms with the inevitable departure of my Fiat Panda 100HP, I figured it was about time to treat myself to something I'd always wanted: a proper lightweight, rear-driven sports car.

Fortunately, my local Mazda dealer had just listed a 2021 Mk4 MX-5 in my near-ideal spec of a rag-top with overhauled 2.0-litre engine and Bilstein dampers. Before they had even uploaded pictures of the thing, I paid a £100 holding deposit and arranged a test drive. Five days later the Panda was gone and I had signed my soul away for the little roadster.

Any buyer's remorse ebbed away when I joined a few colleagues from the office for a road trip around Wales. I've never known a euphoria quite like that I experienced over the 800 miles spent in the Mazda that weekend, blasting a playlist of cheesy noughties hits the whole way.

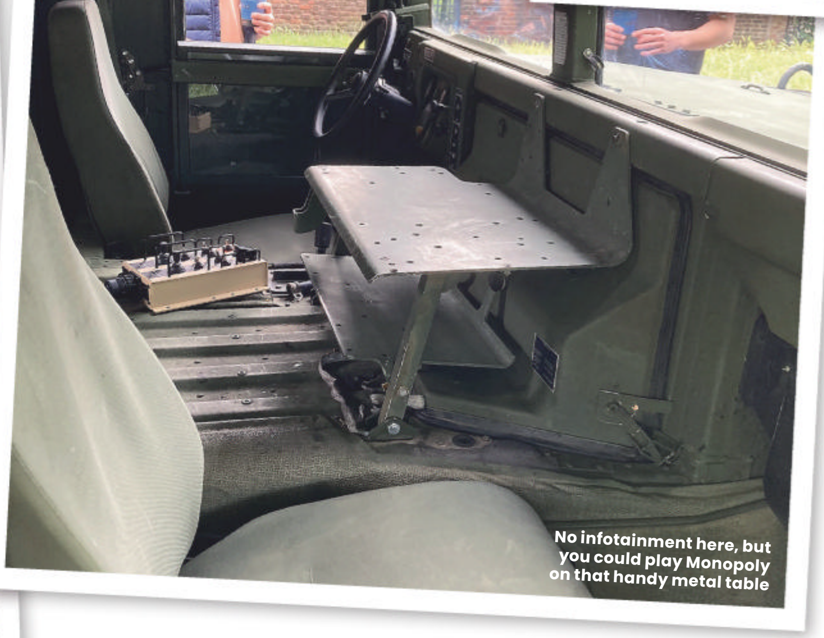
I'll long treasure the memory of nailing my first heel-toe downshift to the soundtrack of The Ketchup Song – completely unconsciously, totally immersed in the twists and turns of the brilliant B4391.

Everything was just right, from the seating position in the car to the beaming sunshine and measured pace of pack-leading drivers Sam Phillips (Renault Clio RS 182 Trophy) and Jack Warrick (Volkswagen Golf GTI Mk7.5).

Many happy days lie ahead, I sense. In the meantime, I need to find out how to clean a cloth roof (suggestions on a postcard) and lay off the terrible music.

Proud dad Charlie took his new baby straight to Wales for a thrashing

Samuel's Humvee always draws a crowd. Right: the 6.5-litre V8 diesel manages just 6mpg



No infotainment here, but you could play Monopoly on that handy metal table

"It's quite wide but nimble, and I can parallel park in one hit. But it has several blindspots"

to power all the ancillaries, when they're fitted. The alternator is humongous – about the size of a Ford Pinto engine."

His Humvee looks seriously heavy, but in fact it weighs 'only' 2300kg. "When they're not on operations, Humvees have their armoured bodies swapped for glassfibre panels on an aluminium body," says Samuel. "This one is a third-generation model that entered US service in 2010. It has done only 2000 miles, most of them shuttling around a base, I suspect."

Sadly, then, it's seen no action – unless, of course, you count its present-day trips into London. "It's wide but quite nimble, and I can parallel park it in London in one hit," says Samuel. "But it has several blindspots, in particular the front pillar. I'm very careful when I approach junctions. The spare wheel at the back can be a problem, too; I've hit many a wall when reversing. Otherwise, it's easy enough to drive."

Samuel bought his Humvee 18 months ago from a friend who imports them. It cost him £40,000, but he's confident that when he sells it, he'll get his money back. He says: "It will make a great promotional car. Everyone wants to ride in it." This is Samuel's second Humvee. His first was a first-generation model built in 1984 and which he bought five years ago before replacing it with this current one – a car he describes as being, in a good way, "night and day" different. "It means I've been driving Humvees for six years now," he says. "I'd love it to be my daily driver, but it's just too impractical as well as thirsty – around 6mpg."

Because it's so wide and therefore won't fit on a conventional garage ramp, he takes it to a coachworks for servicing. A pit is the only safe way to work under it, although its generous, 16in ground clearance means some simpler jobs are possible by crawling underneath. Not this, nor its thirst for fuel, nor its sheer size can dent Samuel's enthusiasm for his Humvee. "When they see it, people of a certain age have a flashback of when they were playing with their Action Man figures," he says, beaming.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

SAM PHILLIPS

2007 BENTLEY CONTINENTAL FLYING SPUR

VS

CHARLIE MARTIN

2005 SUBARU IMPREZA WRX

Brief: Find a powerful, premium saloon that makes a mockery of buying new – for less than £10k

SP Opulent, refined and with more than 550bhp, this '07 Conti Flying Spur W12 is an £8995 bargain. This cost around £115,000 new; now it's less than a new Dacia Spring. I know which I'd rather have.

CM Powerful, sure, but premium it is not. Those fogged-over headlights and scabby sills undo the illusion of posh. My 2005 Subaru, on the other hand, will win hearts and minds in its blue and gold scheme. Mine for £7950.

SP My Conti is showing its age, but it's a lot posher than your WRX. What's premium about an Impreza? Those gold wheels are far too garish. Mine would be welcome at any concours; yours would be more at home at McDonald's smelling of strawberry vape.

CM Listen to any rich rotter's podcast and you'll know that time is money, my friend. And when you can cover ground as quickly as you can in a turbo-boosted WRX, that's even more true. Besides, absurdity is fashionable now: head to Milan and everyone's in a shell suit, and bright colours are well and truly back. This is the new face of luxury.

SP Whatever you say. While we might not agree on the definition of premium saloon, the good news is that you can get a hell of a lot of car for under £10,000.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

CUPRA BORN 77KWH V3

2024, 8500 miles, £27,060

The Cupra Born has an engaging rear-drive chassis, and this V3 has the bigger battery, so you'll get over 300 miles of real-world range. And with 227bhp going to the rear wheels, it has the verve of a warmed-up hatch on a B-road.

FERRARI PORTOFINO

2019, 12,000 miles, £118,990

This stunning Portofino has only done just over 10,000 miles, has been meticulously maintained and has a Ferrari service history. Its 3.9-litre V8 makes 592bhp for a 3.5sec 0-62mph, and it will do 199mph roof down. Tour de France blue and Crema leather is a fine combination, too.

FORD CAPRI 2.0 LASER

1985, 55,000 miles, £13,995

This Capri is in fantastic condition. It's a 2.0-litre Laser with only 55,000 miles from new. The seats are original, but the car was resprayed in 2021 by the previous owner. Its low mileage is confirmed by the stack of MOT and service records.

BENTLEY MULSANNE V8

2012, 10,000 miles, £55,000

This low-mileage Mulsanne cost £150,000 when bought by the previous owner in 2015. It has just had a main dealer service costing £7000, which included a power boot repair and sorting a check engine light issue.

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

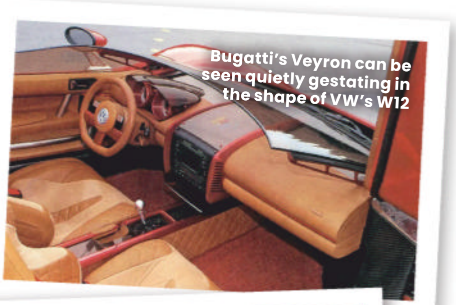
How close we came to a Volkswagen supercar

In last week's magazine you may have read Matt Prior's review of the new Bugatti Mistral – an open-air take on the Chiron, and the very last model to carry the four-turbo W16 engine that had its debut in the Veyron back in 2005.

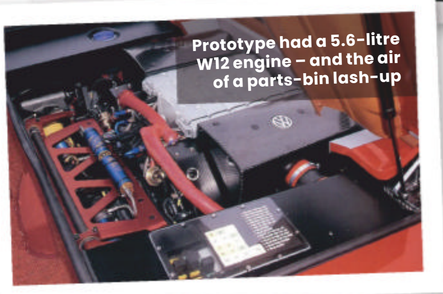
The Mistral's pedigree can be traced back further than the Veyron, though. In 1998, the year Volkswagen bought Bugatti (as well as Bentley, Cosworth and Lamborghini, Ferdinand Piëch being on the acquisitional rampage), the company unveiled a sensational roadster at the Geneva show. Though neither we nor VW knew it at the time, this car was laying the groundwork for future Bugatti roadsters. The engine had a short, W-layout (the block was just 510mm long) and was exposed to the elements amidships. The cockpit was luxurious by supercar standards, and practical to the extent that two golf bags could fit in the boot. Top speed mattered more than handling. And but for the jutting roll hoops, the long-tail silhouette and face were elegantly uncomplicated.

It was called the W12. Volkswagen had previously shown a coupé, but we didn't get to drive the tin-top, whereas just six weeks on from Geneva, Autocar special correspondent Bern Ostmann was in Germany to try the roadster. VW was intending to put these cars into production, and within just two years (the impetuous hand of Piëch again), so it was key the car was seen as a credible rival to Ferrari.

Ostmann described this car being a Volkswagen as "unbelievable". It's understandable. The engine was a 5.6-litre W12 – two VR6 units melded – that made 420bhp and 391lb ft but was to be capable of 700bhp in race trim. Which race? Le Mans. Wanting to make the ultimate statement, VW's intent was to beat the Mercedes CLK GTR and Porsche's GT1. Launch-spec road cars would make 500bhp, pushing against just 1380kg, thanks to the Italdesign-styled Kevlar bodywork.



Bugatti's Veyron can be seen quietly gestating in the shape of VW's W12



Prototype had a 5.6-litre W12 engine – and the air of a parts-bin lash-up

With an eye on new dials that would soon be introduced in the Lupo, Ostmann was waved off by the car's project leader "with an impassioned plea for leniency on the gearbox, especially in the lower ratios". At this point the transmission was a borrowed Audi five-speed automatic "pushed nearly to breaking point". The Veyron Grand Sport (Bugatti's term for roadsters) that this VW W12 would eventually become would famously use a vast, state-of-the-art dual-clutch unit painstakingly developed by Ricardo. At Ostmann's feet, floor-hinged Tilton pedals; ahead of him, inboard suspension at the base of a wraparound screen not tall enough to protect our man's forehead from the icy wind. Behind him, the mighty W12.

The car was commendably stable on straights but prone to wandering in bends. "In need of further development" was the verdict. To the extent that it ever took place, that further development never came to fruition, even if VW was still touting the W12 Roadster as a real production proposition early in 2001, and at a cost of less than £100,000 – £190,000 or so today. By the end of that year, it was looking more unlikely, not least because VW already had Lamborghini to purvey mainstream supercars. Piëch's desire to develop a truly extraordinary performance car that pushed the envelope in every conceivable way had found a sweeter vessel in the nascent Bugatti project.

Ulrich Eichhorn, VW's head of R&D, insisted at the time that the W12 was crucial because it was about raising the brand's profile in a way no Bugatti or Lamborghini could. Fair enough, but then in 2002 Piëch ostentatiously drove a '1-litre' VW concept to a shareholder meeting. It signalled a change of tack. The firm's flagship would one day take the form not of a 200mph supercar but the ultra-efficient XL1.

"Company bosses are determined that by 2002 Volkswagen will field the industry's most comprehensive range, from supermini to supercar," concluded Ostmann in 1998, "and with designs on no less than a Le Mans class win." As it happened, Audi would be the brand to dominate Le Mans, and luxury, W-fired drop-top supercars would be the preserve of Bugatti, ending with the Mistral. But for a while, all that ambition was contained within a slightly ropey and mostly forgotten but fully operational prototype from Wolfsburg.

RICHARD LANE

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ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of empirical road testing is the longest in the world. For more than a century, we have been verifying, scrutinising, describing and illustrating new cars in unparalleled detail. Driving impressions have always been a key part of this, around which the empirical tests have changed.

In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into that century of road testing with a subscription to the digital Autocar archive (visit themagazineshop.com/2025ED/ACA).

Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse	★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo	★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione	★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio	★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione	★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio	★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD	★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition	★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT	★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R	★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4	★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage	★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera	★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish	★★★★⯪	26.3.25	Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707	★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition	★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback	★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung	★★★★☆	9.7.25	Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.	3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-
S5 Launch Edition	★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition	★★★⯪☆	16.4.25	Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT	★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro	★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport	★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic	★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport	★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line	★★★⯪☆	14.5.25	Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1	★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	12.8.15	Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line	★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus	★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT	★★★★☆	2.4.25	Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12	★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline	★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed	★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S	★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition	★★★★☆	16.4.25	Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner	★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44

BMW

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★⯪☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	9.7.25	Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.	4.2	3.3	2637	2.7	314
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★⯪☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2	★★★★☆	18.6.25	Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.	5.6	5.1	1737	35.0	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey	★★★★☆	11.6.25	Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-

DS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★⯪☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★⯪☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

FORD

Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X
★★★★⯪ 20.2.19
Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.
8.9 7.8 1417 43.8 -

Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19
Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.
6.1 4.9 1433 40.7 -

Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium
★★★★⯪ 25.3.20
The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.
10.0 9.6 1260 50.0 -

Puma Gen-E Select ★★★★☆ 4.6.25
Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.
7.2 7.2 - 3.4 179

Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21
Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.
7.2 6.2 1301 41.5 -

Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★⯪☆ 23.10.24
Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.
5.8 4.8 2067 2.9 262

Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★⯪☆ 24.6.20
Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.
- - 1844 - -

Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD
★★★★☆ 23.6.21
Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.
6.8 5.6 2130 - -

Mustang Mach-E GT AWD
★★★☆☆ 27.4.22
Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.
4.2 3.5 2298 - -

Mustang Dark Horse
★★★⯪☆ 20.11.24
Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.
4.5 3.5 1853 26.1 -

Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium
★★★⯪☆ 10.7.24
Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.
10.8 10.6 1426 47.4 -

Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium ★★★⯪☆ 2.7.25
PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.
9.7 9.5 1876 40.3 64

Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24
Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.
12.1 11.8 1971 38.8 -

Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak
★★★★⯪ 14.6.23
Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.
9.8 9.9 2348 36.6 -

GENESIS

G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★⯪☆ 10.11.21
Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.
7.2 6.7 1751 60.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Electrified G80 ★★★⯪☆ 12.10.22
Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.
4.4 4.0 2349 - 272

GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22
Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.
3.8 3.1 2192 - 220

GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater
★★★⯪☆ 15.9.21
Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.
6.7 6.6 2217 45.0 -

GWM

Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition
★★⯪☆☆ 1.2.23
Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.
7.7 7.2 1580 - 154

HONDA

E Advance ★★★⯪☆ 26.8.20
More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.
7.9 - 1535 - 110

Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX
★★★⯪☆ 7.10.20
Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.
9.6 10.0 1248 57.0 -

Civic Type R GT ★★★★⯪ 25.10.17
Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.
5.7 7.1 1400 57.0 -

HR-V e:HEV Advance Style
★★★⯪☆ 24.11.21
Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.
9.2 9.3 1397 43.2 -

e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23
EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.
8.6 6.9 1756 - 211

HYUNDAI

i10 1.2 MPi Premium
★★★★☆ 15.4.20
Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.
12.3 12.9 999 52.5 -

i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect
★★★⯪☆ 24.2.21
Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.
9.7 10.1 1065 63.5 -

i20 N ★★★★⯪ 25.8.21
N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.
6.1 5.4 1231 50.6 -

i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE
★★★⯪☆ 13.9.17
Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.
9.5 9.7 1425 48.9 -

Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★⯪☆ 7.6.23
Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.
7.2 6.2 2006 - 272

Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23
Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.
10.4 10.3 1352 50.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium
★★★★☆ 17.3.21
Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.
7.6 6.2 1612 47.7 -

Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24
A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.
3.5 2.7 2221 - 224

Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium
★★★★☆ 16.10.24
A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.
7.9 7.5 2007 32.9 -

Nexo ★★★⯪☆ 12.6.19
Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.
9.6 9.7 1852 - -

INEOS

Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster
★★★⯪☆ 20.9.23
Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.
8.0 8.1 2682 20.9 -

JAECOO

7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★⯪☆☆ 9.4.25
Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.
7.3 6.4 1814 35.0 41

JAGUAR

XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport ★★★★⯪ 1.7.15
Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.
7.6 6.7 1530 48.7 -

XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD
★★★⯪☆ 17.4.19
Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.
6.6 6.2 1727 36.8 -

E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★⯪☆ 11.4.18
Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.
9.9 10.5 1768 49.2 -

I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★⯪ 12.9.18
Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.
4.5 3.5 2236 - -

F-Pace SVR ★★★★⯪ 24.7.19
Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.
4.1 3.5 2070 29.4 -

F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE
★★★★⯪ 1.12.21
Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.
5.1 4.6 2264 - 24

F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé
★★★★☆ 29.4.20
The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.
- - 1743 - -

JEEP

Avenger Electric Summit
★★★⯪☆ 24.1.24
Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.
8.3 6.9 1601 - 172

Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 3.10.18
Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.
11.0 11.5 1540 44.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22
Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.
6.4 5.7 1872 46.9 22

Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 28.10.15
Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.
10.8 11.2 1502 52.6 -

Renegade 4xe Trailhawk
★★★☆☆ 30.6.21
Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.
6.7 5.6 1816 39.4 21

Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland
★★★★☆ 10.4.19
Off-road icon is now more competent on it.
9.0 9.1 2122 37.6 -

KGM

Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★☆☆ 14.9.16
Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.
12.0 12.6 1469 - -

Torres 1.5T K40 AWD ★★⯪☆☆ 4.6.25
Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.
11.3 12.0 1661 35.0 -

KIA

Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★⯪☆ 11.9.24
No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.
13.4 13.9 985 51.4 -

Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2 ★★★★☆ 29.8.18
Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.
9.9 9.6 1411 70.3 -

TOP 3

BEST SUPERCARS

1 McLaren Artura

2 Lamborghini Revuelto

3 Porsche 911 S/T

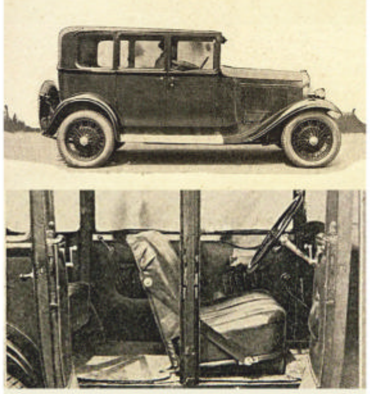
SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1994 MAZDA MX-5 1.8

The car that revived the affordable roadster with its exquisite handling, easy daily usability, just-so size and retro styling gains a more powerful 1.8, a stiffer chassis and some weight. It is "every bit as desirable" as the 1.6 car it replaces. "It may be no faster… but its handling is even better."

Price £17,395
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1839cc, petrol
Power 128bhp at 6500rpm
Torque 110lb ft at 5000rpm
Weight 1020kg
0-60mph 10.1sec
Top speed 115mph
70-0mph 80.0m (wet)
Economy 23.6mpg



1929 CITROEN SALOON 13-30HP

Five-seater proves "very well equipped, roomy and comfortable" and it is "difficult to detect whether a four- or a six-cylinder engine is supplying the power". Our verdict? "This Citroën gives the impression of being well up to its work."

Price £255 (with saloon body)
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1628cc, petrol
Power 30bhp at 3000rpm
Torque na
Weight 1181kg
0-60mph na
Top speed 55mph
25-0mph 7.6m
Economy 25mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S ★★★⯪☆ 27.2.19 Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition ★★★⯪☆ 20.11.19 Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban ★★★⯪☆ 5.7.23 Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3 ★★★★☆ 7.9.22 A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line ★★★★☆ 31.12.24 New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S ★★★⯪☆ 15.6.22 Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 9.10.24 Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT ★★★⯪☆ 4.10.23 Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2 ★★★⯪☆ 20.1.21 Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 31.1.24 Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante ★★★★⯪ 11.10.17 Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD ★★★★⯪ 20.5.20 Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto ★★★★⯪ 4.12.24 New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus ★★★★☆ 3.7.19 Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯪ 10.2.21 A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE ★★★★☆ 8.1.20 Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury ★★★★⯪ 12.4.17 A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE ★★★⯪☆ 30.8.17 Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X ★★★★⯪ 13.5.20 World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1 ★★★★⯪ 30.4.25 Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE ★★★★⯪ 2.11.22 Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One ★★★⯪☆ 28.8.24 More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE ★★★★⯪ 13.7.22 A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography ★★★★☆ 9.4.25 A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design ★★★⯪☆ 29.5.24 Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack ★★★★☆ 16.3.22 Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport ★★★⯪☆ 22.3.23 Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi ★★★⯪☆ 6.2.19 Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition ★★★⯪☆ 6.11.24 Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi ★★★☆☆ 7.2.24 MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition ★★★★⯪ 2.4.25 The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT ★★★★☆ 28.5.25 A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R ★★★⯪☆ 24.7.24 There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel ★★★⯪☆ 12.3.14 Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo ★★★⯪☆ 18.10.23 A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel ★★★☆☆ 30.11.16 A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso ★★★⯪☆ 8.5.19 Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo ★★★⯪☆ 11.9.24 An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.25 Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav ★★★★☆ 22.4.15 The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport ★★★★☆ 6.11.19 Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech ★★★⯪☆ 10.3.21 Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line ★★★★☆ 19.2.25 Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav ★★★★☆ 28.6.17 Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line ★★★⯪☆ 10.5.23 Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav ★★★★⯪ 2.9.15 An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S ★★★★★ 24.5.17 Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★½	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★½	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★½☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★½	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★½	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★½☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★½☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★½	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus	★★★★½	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class	★★★★☆	7.5.25	Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★½☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★½	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★½☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
S5 EV Long Range Trophy	★★★★☆	23.7.25	It outstrips expectations for the money, except on range.	6.0	5.1	1723	3.3	217
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-

MINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
John Cooper Works	★★★★☆	14.5.25	A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★½☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★½☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★½☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★½	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★½☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★½☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★½☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-

TOP 3

BEST CITY CARS

1 Fiat Grande Panda

2 Hyundai i10

3 Citroën C3

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

e-2008 GT Line ★★★⯪☆ 30.9.20
Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.
9.5 8.9 1638 - -

e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★⯪☆ 4.8.24
Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.
8.5 7.1 2132 - 219

5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★☆☆ 12.2.25
Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.
9.9 9.4 1736 44.0 -

POLESTAR

2 BST Edition 270 ★★★⯪☆ 12.4.23
A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.
4.5 3.4 2161 - 188

3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 12.2.25
Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.
4.6 3.8 2610 2.3 235

PORSCHE

718 Boxster ★★★★⯪ 8.6.16
Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.
5.4 4.3 1395 35.9 -

718 Cayman S ★★★★⯪ 10.8.16
Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.
4.8 3.9 1430 - -

718 Spyder ★★★★⯪ 1.4.20
Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.
4.3 3.5 1350 30.1 -

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC FAMILY CARS

1 BMW iX

2 Volkswagen ID Buzz

3 Volkswagen ID 7

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22
A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.
3.9 3.0 1444 27.1 -

911 GT3 PDK ★★★★⯪ 11.8.21
Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.
3.4 2.7 1430 29.2 -

911 Turbo S ★★★★⯪ 10.8.22
Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.
2.5 2.0 1640 36.3 -

911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ 30.8.23
Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.
4.9 3.8 1456 39.1 -

911 GT3 RS ★★★★⯪ 22.11.23
Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.
3.2 2.5 1476 26.7 -

911 Dakar ★★★★☆ 10.1.24
Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.
3.3 2.6 1660 36.0 -

911 S/T ★★★★★ 3.7.24
Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.
3.7 2.6 1408 30.9 -

911 Carrera GTS ★★★★⯪ 5.3.25
Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.
2.8 2.6 1607 34.3 -

Macan Turbo ★★★★⯪ 4.6.14
Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.
4.7 4.3 2050 30.9 -

Macan Turbo Electric ★★★⯪☆ 19.2.25
Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.
3.0 2.5 - 2.1 219

Cayenne S ★★★★⯪ 21.2.24
Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.
5.0 4.3 2256 28.8 -

Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ 5.9.18
As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.
3.9 3.4 2307 31.5 -

Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid ★★★⯪☆ 27.5.20
Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.
- - 2490 - -

Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé ★★★★☆ 20.7.22
Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.
3.1 2.7 2251 26.1 -

Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★☆ 22.1.25
Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.
3.8 2.4 2370 30.1 29

Taycan Turbo S ★★★★⯪ 30.10.24
Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.
2.6 1.9 2356 2.7 233

RENAULT

Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★⯪ 27.11.19
Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.
11.6 10.9 1138 56.9 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

4 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic ★★★★☆ 16.7.25
Charismatic but grown-up, the reborn 4 is a real contender.
8.2 7.5 1493 3.3 182

5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five ★★★★⯪ 12.3.25
Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.
7.7 7.2 1461 3.1 166

Megane E-Tech Techno ★★★⯪☆ 23.11.22
Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.
6.9 5.4 1688 - 198

Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC ★★★⯪☆ 18.3.20
Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.
9.4 9.2 1363 53.1 -

Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition ★★★⯪☆ 13.10.21
Eminently sensible but unspectacular.
11.0 10.1 1365 58.3 -

Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range ★★★★☆ 26.6.24
The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.
8.1 6.3 1916 - 313

Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine ★★★⯪☆ 19.7.23
Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.
8.5 6.9 1696 43.5 -

ROLLS-ROYCE

Ghost Series II Black Badge ★★★★⯪ 25.6.25
Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.
4.5 3.6 2576 25.8 -

Phantom ★★★★★ 4.4.18
The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.
5.5 4.4 2780 28.4 -

Spectre ★★★★⯪ 20.12.23
Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.
4.1 3.1 2935 - 245

Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ 19.2.20
Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.
4.9 4.2 2739 23.6 -

SEAT

Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★⯪ 19.7.17
Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.
10.0 10.0 1047 55.6 -

Leon eHybrid FR ★★★⯪☆ 2.12.20
Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.
7.2 6.2 1558 46.3 26

Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★☆ 15.11.17
Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.
10.5 10.7 1149 40.9 -

Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG ★★★☆☆ 25.10.23
Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.
8.9 8.0 1396 44.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

SKODA

Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort ★★★★⯪ 9.2.22
Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.
9.9 9.7 1117 58.7 -

Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG ★★★⯪☆ 31.7.19
Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.
7.9 7.3 1200 52.9 -

Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ 2.9.20
Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.
8.4 8.7 1510 73.0 -

Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★☆ 29.1.25
A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.
5.9 4.8 - 37.6 -

Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate ★★★★★ 17.7.24
The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.
8.4 8.2 1673 68.7 -

Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout ★★★⯪☆ 30.1.19
Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.
8.9 9.6 1629 47.1 -

Elroq 85 Edition ★★★★⯪ 19.3.25
Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.
6.1 5.0 2085 3.5 246

Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ 18.8.21
Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.
8.3 7.8 2098 - 262

SMART

#1 Premium ★★★⯪☆ 8.11.23
Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.
5.6 4.6 1861 - 229

#3 Premium ★★★⯪☆ 15.5.24
Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.
5.7 4.9 1832 - 205

SUBARU

Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring ★★★⯪☆ 28.2.24
Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.
10.4 10.4 1620 45.3 -

Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring ★★★⯪☆ 27.9.23
A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.
9.3 8.7 1690 42.8 -

Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ 15.3.23
A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.
6.7 6.2 2051 - 169

SUZUKI

Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT ★★★★⯪ 7.4.21
Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.
6.4 5.8 1966 44.4 48

TESLA

Model 3 Standard Range Plus ★★★★☆ 4.9.19
Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.
5.8 4.7 1633 - 156

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★⯪	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★⯪☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★⯪☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★⯪☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★⯪☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★⯪☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★⯪☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★⯪☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★⯪☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★⯪	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★⯪	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★⯪	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★⯪☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★⯪☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★⯪☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★⯪	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★⯪	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★⯪☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★⯪☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★⯪☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★⯪☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★⯪☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★⯪☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★⯪	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★⯪☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright	★★★⯪☆	2.7.25	Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.	8.0	7.5	2117	37.0	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

BMW M2 CS September
Weight savings, new aero and an aggressive suspension set-up will prime it for track use.

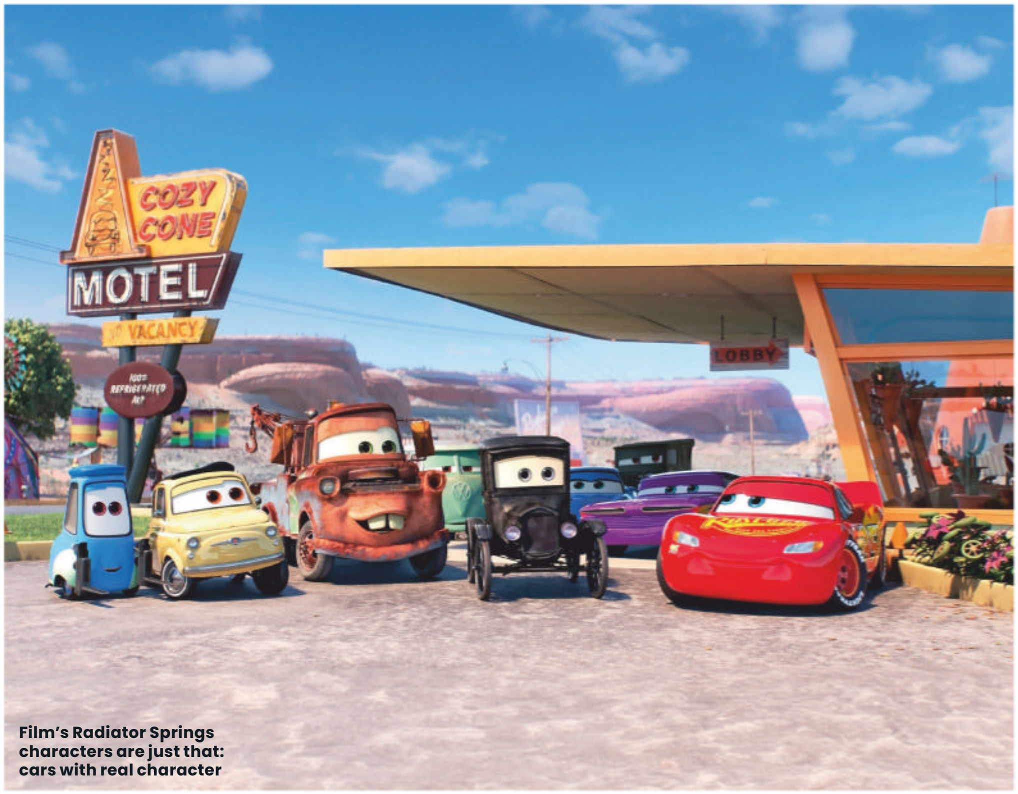
DS N°7 November
Upmarket family SUV from Stellantis will be launched exclusively with electric power.

Denza B5 2026
BYD brand's 4x4 mixes Defender levels of off-roading ability with supercar-grade power.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love…
DISNEY'S CARS

BY SOPHIA GRACE



Film's Radiator Springs characters are just that: cars with real character

Cars was the first film we took my younger brother to see in the cinema, and he loved it so much that we had to go back and watch it another three times. So I suppose I have him to thank for my Lightning McQueen mega-fan status.

In case you're unfamiliar, this Golden Globe-winning 2006 Pixar film tells the story of an arrogant, anthropomorphic Nascar-esque oval racer who's in with a shout of winning the prestigious 'Piston Cup' in his rookie season.

After an unlikely three-way tie for the title in the final race, the series organisers hastily arrange a decider the following week on the other side of the country, and hero McQueen duly sets off in his truck, Mack, to head to the fictional Los Angeles International Motor Speedway.

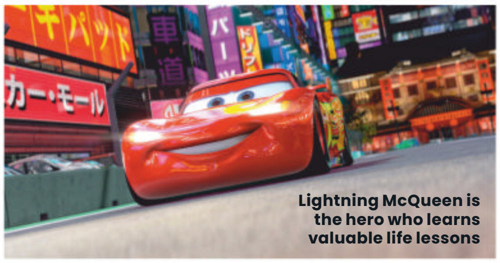
During the night, Lightning is separated from Mack after he rolls out of the back of the truck, and while frantically trying to find his way back, inadvertently rips up the high street of a backwater town called Radiator Springs. Forced to stay until he repairs it, he begrudgingly gets to work, keen to make it to LA in time for the race.

During his quasi-confinement, he meets Doc Hudson, the cantankerous town mayor who turns out to be legendary three-time Piston Cup winner Hudson Hornet. After a fractious start, Doc becomes McQueen's mentor and later his crew chief at the tiebreaker race, where McQueen nobly sacrifices a guaranteed win to attend to one of his rivals after a crash – his short small-town sojourn having taught him the values of empathy and kindness.

Sorry for the spoilers, but you really should have watched it by now.

> **"I owe the film's creators a debt of gratitude"**

The idea of a stuck-up 'cooler-than-everyone-else' athlete type being humbled by a tight-knit community of misfits and learning how they thrive by relying on each other is so wholesome. It leaves my heart full every time I watch it.



Lightning McQueen is the hero who learns valuable life lessons

Let's not forget the phenomenal soundtrack either, which features hits such as Life is a Highway by Rascal Flatts (a fantastic karaoke choice), Route 66 by John Mayer and the mood-boosting opener, Real Gone by Sheryl Crow.

Everything about the film holds real nostalgic value for me, and watching it brings back happy memories of the mini Radiator Springs my dad made for my brother one Christmas. It contained die-cast models of all the Radiator Springs characters sitting next to their respective businesses. Luigi the Fiat 500 was manning his tyre shop alongside Guido the forklift, Sarge the Willys Jeep proudly guarded his army surplus store, and of course Sally the 996-generation Porsche 911 was waiting to welcome guests to her traffic cone-themed motel.

Probably the main reason that I love this Disney classic, though, is that it reminds me of the good old days when I didn't have adult responsibilities and all I had to worry about was beating my brother's high score on the accompanying PlayStation 2 video game (an oft-overlooked gem). But I owe its creators a debt of gratitude for instilling in me at an early age the notion that cars can have personalities and fantastic stories to tell – even if they don't have eyes and tongues in real life.

Oh, and true to form, Cars 2 is definitely nowhere near as good as the first one, and I will die on that hill.

What we did this week

FRINGE FESTIVAL

The Goodwood Festival of Speed was a proper scorcher this year, so what better way to cool off than… a haircut? Located on 'Mini Street', the Aceman Barbers pop-up was run by London-based Ruffians. And, no, this wasn't a gimmick: it offered everything from a 'tidy-up' to an 'MOT'. There was even a queue! **WILL RIMELL**

DANCING WITH THE STARS

When asked if you fancy riding shotgun with Travis Pastrana on Goodwood's rally stage, you don't refuse. I was lucky enough to get the call-up, and it exceeded all expectations. The daredevil danced his wide-bodied Subaru WRX ARA through the driveway-tight forest tracks with aplomb, and even managed a conversation amid the chaos. Lovely bloke too. **CHARLIE MARTIN**

CROSSOVER-SIMPLIFYING

I heard one Goodwood festival-goer muttering that they "just don't like SUVs" as they came off a manufacturer's stand, and as I parked a Renault 4 next to a Defender Octa at my campsite that evening, I wondered what they'd meant. Can you really lump together everything from an outrageous V8 4x4 to a fun-sized urban EV runaround? To each their own, forever and always, but let's not generalise, shall we? **FELIX PAGE**

DISNEY

AUTOCAR PODCAST

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

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LEXUS
NX
NX
LEXUS NX PLUG-IN HYBRID
EXPERIENCE AMAZING
BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

Model shown is MY25 NX 450h+ Fuel economy: Mpg (l/100km) (weighted combined): 282.4 (1) to 256.8 (1.1). Electric energy consumption (weighted combined): 2.5 to 2.3 miles/kWh. CO_2 emissions (weighted): 22 to 26 g/km. Equivalent all-electric range: 45.9 to 42.5 miles. Plug-in hybrid vehicle requiring mains electricity for charging. Figures obtained using a combination of battery power and fuel and only for comparison purposes. Only compare figures with other similar cars tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon several factors. UK specifications may vary